HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY TRAINING:
FROM ANTI-DISCRIMINATION COMPLIANCE
TO ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Marc Bendick, Jr./Mary Lou Egan/Suzanne M. Lofhjelm

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Workforce Diversity Training: From Anti-Discrimination Compliance to Organizational Development

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Our survey of training providers reveals that contemporary workplace training about employment discrimination and workforce diversity encompasses a variety of approaches. Many training programs focus on individual attitudes and appear to have only modest effects. To the extent that training more comprehensively addresses individual behavior, organizational systems, and employer performance goals, their effectiveness appears to increase. A particularly comprehensive approach, rooted in the theory of organizational development, can be identified by the presence of nine benchmark training practices. Although initiatives adopting this final approach appear to be the most effective, they are commonly implemented by only 25 percent of diversity trainers.
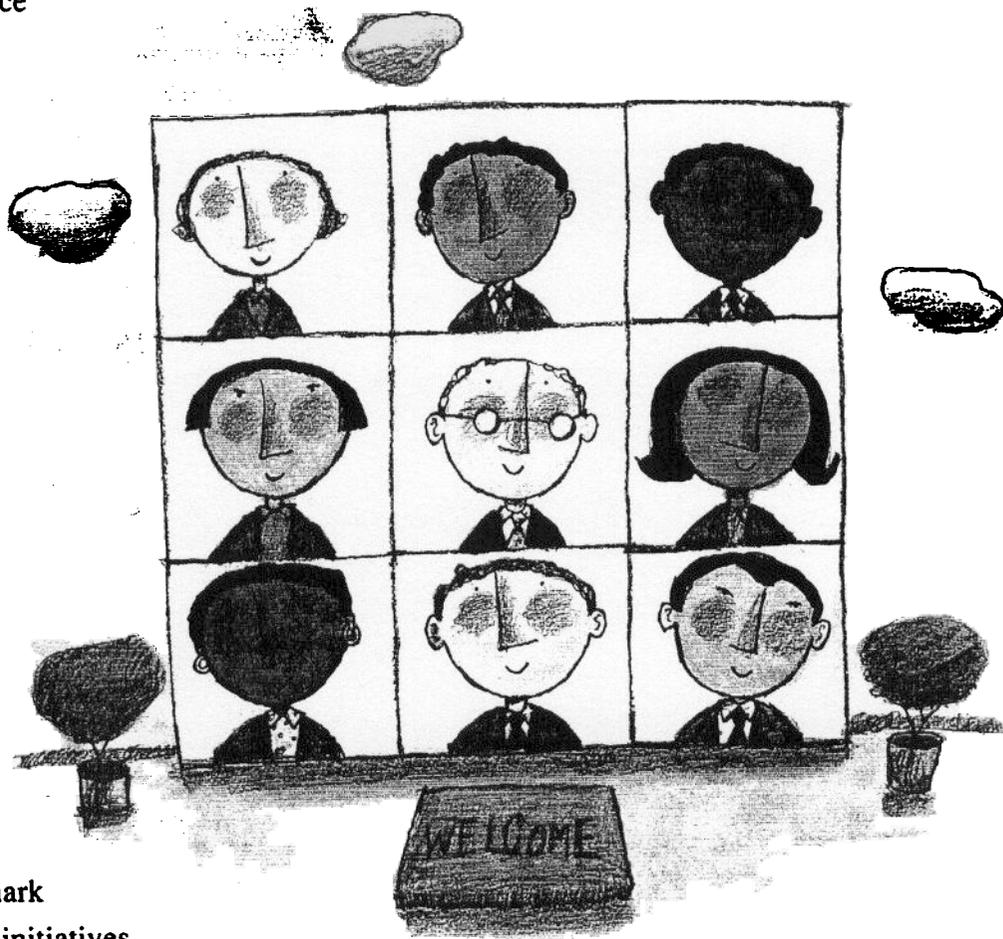
In the first decades following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, anti-discrimination training in the American workplace primarily provided straightforward rules to employees about behavior required or forbidden under federal and state laws. Training in this style remains common, now frequently focusing on such topics as sexual harassment and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Starting in the mid-1980s and accelerating throughout the 1990s, many of these efforts have evolved into more ambitious undertakings with a different label – diversity training – and a more strategic role in human resource management.

This study empirically profiles diversity training in American workplaces today, using a structured survey of training providers. It describes this training's varying forms and assesses their effects. We find that the most modest training programs typically focus on individual attitudes, whereas more comprehensive efforts typically add consideration of individual behavior and employers' human resource policies and systems. The most comprehensive initiatives, which we define with nine benchmarks, are full-scale efforts to change workplace cultures using organizational development approaches. As the scope and depth of training efforts increase, their effectiveness, as perceived by both training providers and our research team, also increases. Nevertheless, only about 25 percent of training providers in our survey typically practice the most comprehensive, organizational development approach.

Prior Research

No definitive estimate is available concerning the prevalence of diversity training in the American workplace today; however, it appears to be undertaken by the majority of large employers in both the public and private sectors, as well as a substantial proportion of medium-size and smaller ones, and its use continues to expand. For example, a 1995 survey of the 50 largest U.S. industrial firms found that 70 percent had a formal diversity management program, typically including training, and an additional 8 percent were developing one (Lynch, 1997, p. 7). In a 1994 survey of members of the Society for Human Resource Management, 33 percent reported that their employers provided training on workforce diversity, making it about as common as training in sales techniques (35%) or clerical skills (31%) (Rynes and Rosen, 1995).

And in a 1995 survey, 50 percent of members of the American Management Association reported having formal programs for managing diversity, with training a usual component; this figure had risen from 46 percent in 1992 (AMA, 1996, p.6).

Despite diversity training's prevalence, little systematic research is available to resolve often-vociferous debates about its nature and effects. One side of these debates argues the continuing need for and effectiveness of the activity. Some authors emphasize the benefits for employees in terms of reduction of discrimination, while others emphasize the benefits for employers in terms of productivity. For example, Thomas (1990, p.108) has written:

> Women and blacks who are seen as having the necessary skills and energy can get into the work force relatively easily. It's later on that many of them plateau and lose their drive and quit or get fired. It's later on that their managers' inability to manage diversity hobbles them and the companies they work for.... I don't think that affirmative action alone can cope with the remaining long-term task of creating work settings geared to the upward mobility of all kinds of people.

Focusing on training, another scholar concurs in predicting positive results (Cox, 1994, pp. 236-237):

> The most commonly utilized starting point for organizational development work on managing diversity is some type of employee education program.... Even elementary educational efforts do have positive effects on perceptions and attitudes. Most experts agree that education is a crucial first step.

Equally adamant, other authors find training and other diversity initiatives counter-productive. Some reject the activity for philosophical reasons (Lynch, 1997, p. 325):

> The ambitious organization change masters astride the diversity machine...are extending affirmative action's top-down hiring campaign into a broader multi-cultural revolution in the American workplace and beyond. Both the ends and the means of this policy movement pose a substantial threat to...free speech; individualism; nondiscrimination on the basis of ethnicity, gender, or religion; and equality of opportunity.
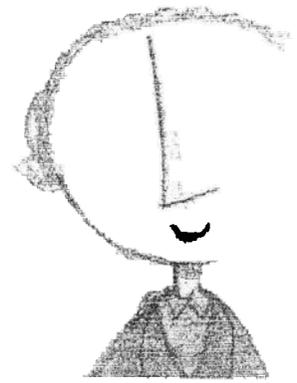
Others view it as ineffective or harmful in practice (Hemphill and Haines, 1997, pp. 3-5):

> In spite of its positive intent, it is unrealistic to think that with three to five hours of diversity training, complex sociological and cultural principles could be clearly understood, much less applied to all interpersonal relationships... Social conflict was created from the attempt to deal publicly with sensitive social and personal issues better dealt with elsewhere.... Many personal agendas, minority platforms, and social conflicts were frequently major portions of the program....White males report that they are tired of being made to feel guilty.... Groups that already felt oppressed left the diversity program feeling even more vulnerable and victimized.

Whether supportive or critical, most of these writings address diversity management generally rather than the training component that is our specific subject. In addition, their evidence is largely anecdotal.

Two studies have attempted more systematic evaluations. One surveyed 922 employees in one department of a large firm where diversity training had been conducted. Respondents who received training reported themselves substantially more supportive of diversity, and perceived their employer to be more supportive, than those who did not (Ellis and Sonnenfeld, 1992). The second study used a mail survey of members of the Society for Human Resource Management whose employers had provided diversity training. About 33 percent rated the training "extremely successful" or "quite successful," 50 percent estimated "neutral or mixed" success, and 17 percent judged it unsuccessful – on balance, moderately more favorable than unfavorable. In that study, design factors perceived to be associated with success included mandatory attendance for managers, training followup, top management support, explicit rewards for diversity, and a broad definition of diversity (Rynes and Rosen, 1995).

Research Methods

This study addresses the same controversies through a survey of providers of diversity training throughout the United States. Because no comprehensive sampling frame identifies the universe of such providers, random sampling to generate a nationally representative sample was not feasible. We therefore applied stratified convenience sampling to obtain a broadly inclusive group of respondents. Potential respondents were identified from industry directories, attendance lists of national conferences, advertisements and articles in the trade press, Internet sites, and word of mouth. From these sources, respondents were selected to encompass a variety of geographical locations, industries, demographic foci, size, and other characteristics (in-house staff versus outside consultants, non-profit versus for-profit). Respondents that could not be contacted or refused to participate were replaced by others with similar characteristics. The result was a completed sample of 108, a 73 percent response rate (Bendick, et al., 1998, pp. 22-27).

Interviews were conducted by telephone during the second half of 1997 using a 338-item structured questionnaire completed in about 45 minutes. The respondent was the most senior person in the organization with direct involvement in diversity training (e.g., practice directors in consulting firms, directors of diversity in corporations). Individual responses were treated confidentially.

A Profile of Workplace Diversity Training

Exhibit 1 describes the characteristics of the training providers surveyed. Although these data in part reflect our sampling procedure and are not necessarily nationally representative, the exhibit demonstrates that diversity training can be obtained from a variety of sources, both for-profit (training vendors, consultants, lawyers, media producers) and non-profit (anti-bias organizations, universities, trade and professional associations).

About two-thirds of providers can be described as well-established and possessing considerable resources and experience, while about one-third operate on a more limited scale. For example, between 60 percent and 84 percent operate nationwide, have provided this training for at least five years, and have served at least several hundred clients.

Exhibit 2 describes the individuals who conduct training sessions. Critics sometimes portray these trainers primarily as advocates of their own

> Respondents who received training reported themselves substantially more supportive of diversity, and perceived their employer to be more supportive, than those who did not.

Characteristics of 108 Organizations Providing Diversity Training

Characteristic	% of Respondents
Legal status*	
Private, for-profit	73.9
Government agency	15.1
Private, non-profit	11
Total	100
Primary product or service*	
For-profit training	44.6
For-profit consulting	17.6
Legal services	10.8
Anti-discrimination services	12.1
Degree-granting education	9.5
Trade or professional association	5.4
Total	100
Geographic range of clientele	
Entire U.S. or U.S. and international	63
Primarily one region	37
Total	100
Years providing training	
< 5	29.2
5-9	21.7
≥ 10	49.1
Total	100
Number of clients to which have provided training*	
Dozens	40
Hundreds	44
Thousands	16
Total	100
Number of staff senior enough to lead a training session	
1	13.9
2-10	52.8
>10	33.3
Total	100

* excludes 35 respondents who are employers' in-house staff.

Characteristics of Diversity Trainers

Characteristic	% of Respondents
Proportion of trainers from protected groups	
All or most	48.6
Some	43
Few or none	8.4
Total	100
When trainers are from protected groups, are they	
From a single group	10.2
From multiple groups	89.8
Total	100
Primary basis of trainers' expertise	
Multiple or mixed	42.6
Organizational development or training	23.1
Business experience or business training	13.9
Legal experience or training	13
Personal experience in A protected group	7.4
Total	100

discriminated-against groups. The exhibit suggests, however, that this circumstance is rare. Many trainers are members of groups traditionally facing discrimination: Only 8.4 percent of respondents reported that few or none of their staff come from groups protected under employment discrimination laws. But only 10.2 percent described their entire staff as coming from a single group, and only 7.4 percent described this staff's primary source of expertise as personal experience. Based on comments made during interviews, no more

than 5 among the 108 respondents could be described as strident advocates. The majority presented themselves in a highly "business-like" manner and described their programs in terms reflecting their education and experience in management, organization development, human resource management, or law. Membership in a protected group may confer the *appearance* of expertise on issues of discrimination and diversity – *a source effect* (Kotler, 1994, p. 607) – but the training they deliver is predominantly profession-ally, rather than personally, based.

Exhibit 3 describes the clients to whom training is provided. Typical client organizations include employers from a broad spectrum of industries, government agencies, and non-profit organizations. Consistent with prior surveys, larger employers are more common than smaller ones: While 87.8 percent of survey respondents reported that they typically work with firms of 5,000 or more employees, only 30.9 percent reported typically working with firms of 100 or fewer employees.

According to Exhibit 3, 70.4 percent of respondents typically deliver training to individual organizations separately; only 11.1 percent pri-marily provide sessions attended by personnel from multiple firms.

EXHIBIT 3

Characteristics of Diversity Trainees

Characteristic	% of Respondents
Client organizations typically include+	
Private for-profit firms	74.8
Government agencies	58
Non-profit organizations	52.3
others	4.7
Private sector client firms typically includes firms with what number of total employees?+	
< 100	30.9
100-499	43.2
500-999	53.1
1,000 - 4,999	65.4
> 5,000	87.8
Private sector client firms typically include those from which industries?+	
Services	80.2
Transportation	80
Manufacturing	73.8
Finance, insurance, and real estate	67.5
Wholesale or retail trade	55
Construction	30
Composition of trainees in a single training class	
Employees from a single firm	70.4
Open session- multiple firms	11.1
Varies	18.5
Total	100
What are important motivations for training for most or all client firms?+	
Increase productivity or improve Customer relationships	82.1
Comply with anti-discrimination Laws or prevent litigation	37.4
Improve firm's ability to operate In international markets	27.2
Meet the requirements of a litigation Settlement	4.8
Level of employees typically trained+	
Mid-level mangers and supervisors	98.1
Senior executives	83.1
Human resource staff	82.2
Non-supervisory employees	78.7
Others	11.2
Trainee enrollment is	
Compulsory	34.3
Voluntary	28.7
The policy varies	37
Total	100

+ Respondents could select more than one response.

Exhibit 3 also reveals that employers' reasons for initiating training emphasize the operational needs of their businesses more than moral and legal concerns. Some 82.3 percent of respondents report productivity or improved customer relationships as important motivation for most or all their clients, while only 37.4 percent describe compliance with discrimination laws as an important client goal.

Concerning individual trainees, Exhibit 3 indicates that enrollment is often not limited to managers and supervisors who make employment decisions, with 78.7 percent of respondents reporting that typical trainees include non-supervisory employees. Mid-level managers and supervisors are the most common participants, with 98.1 percent of respondents describing them as typical trainees. Senior executives are typical trainees for 83.1 percent of respondents.

Exhibit 4 profiles training activities. In a typical course, about 25 trainees work with either one or two instructors for an average of 10 hours. In some cases, trainees are drawn from different levels in the organization, from executives to non-supervisory employees, while in others the groups are more homogeneous.[1] An eclectic mix of instructional methods is used, with emphasis on active learning. *Every* survey respondent reported using at least one instructional method, such as role playing or discussions of real incidents from the workplace, fostering trainees' active participation.

Exhibit 4 also describes the content of diversity training. One set of frequent topics focuses on individual trainees' *awareness* of discrimination and trainees' personal attitudes toward members of different demographic groups. Such topics include: discrimination in the workplace (typically covered by 97.2% of survey respondents); the role of stereotypes in perceptions and decisions (91.3%); how a diverse workforce contributes to productivity (82.4%); the content of stereotypes about different groups (65.4%); white male backlash (64.9%); the cultures of different groups (61.1%); and discrimination outside the workplace (55.6%).

One example of such awareness material is a videotape portraying the so-called "blue-eyed, brown-eyed" exercise, presented in a videotape:

> [The trainer] challenges a mixed race group of about 40 people in Kansas City to confront the racism which persists in our society and to experience its effects personally. She divides

EXHIBIT 4

Diversity Training Activities and Content
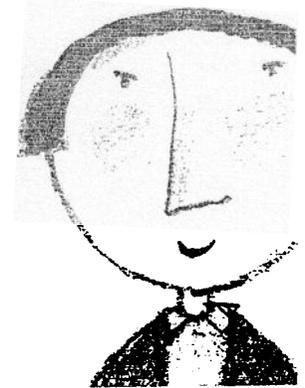
Characteristic	% of Respondents	Average
Number of trainees in a typical training group		
Optimal		23.9
Maximum		43.6
Number of trainers per course		
1	44.1	
2	46.1	
>2	9.8	
Total	100	
Number of training hours in		
Most frequently provided course		10
Longest course		20.1
Shortest course		4.2
Hierarchical composition of classes		
Employees from a range of levels are trained together	43.4	
Employees from different levels are trained separately	30.2	
The policy varies	26.4	
Total	100	
Training methods+		
Written handouts	99.1	
Group exercises	95.3	
Lectures or mini-lectures	87.7	
Discussion of actual incidents from the workplace	84.1	
Case studies	75.7	
Self-awareness exercises	73.6	
Video tapes	70.4	
Role playing	70.1	
Interaction with trainees of different backgrounds	49.1	
Topics typically covered+		
Problems of discrimination in the workplace	97.2	
The role of stereotypes in discrimination	91.3	
How to make different groups welcome in the workplace	84.3	
How a diverse workforce contributes to productivity	82. 4	
The client organization's policies on discrimination	66.7	
Non-discriminatory employee evaluations/promotion	65.7	
The content of stereotypes about different groups	65.4	
White male "backlash"	64.9	
Promoting retention and development of different groups	64.8	
The provisions of equal employment opportunity law	61.1	
The cultures of different demographic groups	61.1	
Nondiscriminatory employee recruitment/hiring	58.3	
Problems of discrimination outside the workplace	55.6	
Other	48.5	
Important goals of training+		
Change the workplace behavior of individual trainees	95.4	
Promote organizational change	90.7	
Increase trainees' awareness of discrimination issues	88.8	
Decrease trainees' use of stereotypes	85.3	
Change trainees' attitudes toward protected groups	61.7	
Make the content of stereotypes more positive	34.6	
Other goals	3.4	

+ Respondents could select more than one response.

the group on the basis of eye color and then subjects the blue-eyed people to a withering regime of humiliation and contempt. In just a few hours, we watch grown professionals become distracted and despondent, stumbling over the simplest commands. The people of color in the group are surprised that whites react so quickly to the kind of discrimination they face every day of their lives. And [the trainer] points out that sexism, ageism, and homophobia can have similar effects.... People who have experienced prejudice themselves, if only for a few hours in a controlled environment, are much less likely to discriminate against their fellow employees.

A second set of topics focuses on individuals' *behavior*, including practical ideas for acting differently – for example, techniques for making different groups welcome in the workplace (covered by 84.3% of survey respondents), nondiscriminatory employee evaluations and promotions (65.7%), increasing the retention and development of different groups (64.8%), and nondiscriminatory recruitment and hiring (58.3%).

In Exhibit 4, 95.4 percent of respondents identify changing the workplace behavior of individual trainees as an important training goal, while 90.7 percent identify promoting organizational change as a major objective. These goals are cited at a somewhat higher rate than increasing trainees' awareness concerning discrimination (88.8%) and changing trainees' attitudes (61.7%). Of course, trainers who focus on awareness and attitudes typically believe that changes in behavior will follow. Nevertheless, some inconsistency remains between providers' emphasis on behavior as a target they seek to influence and their relative lack of focus on behavior itself. While answering our structured questions, more than a dozen survey respondents commented spontaneously that their current priority for improving training was to strengthen its practical behavioral content.

Nearly all survey respondents expressed a belief that training should not be an isolated initiative but part of a broader change process. Exhibit 5 lists 10 diversity management activities often undertaken to complement training. Among these, 86.9 percent of respondents characterized adoption of formal policies against discrimination as a very important reinforcement to training. This activity was joined by: improving human resource management practices (82.2%), disciplining or firing employees who discriminate

Employer Actions Survey Respondents Rated as Very Important to Reinforce Diversity Training+

Action	% of Respondents
Adopting formal policies against discrimination or in favor of diversity	86.9
Improving specific human resource management practices	82.2
Disciplining or firing employees who discriminate	68.6
Including equal opportunity in managers' performance evaluations	64.4
Providing an accessible discrimination complaint process	57.9
Providing mentoring and similar staff development programs	57.9
Celebrating diversity in company publications	39.8
Establishing a diversity advisory committee	39
Establishing numerical goals for employing protected groups	34.3
Employing full-time diversity staff	33

+ Respondents could select more than one response.

(68.6%), including equal opportunity in managers' performance evaluations (64.4%), and providing a discrimination complaint process (57.9%). Fewer than half characterized the remaining four actions listed in Exhibit 5 as very important. Notably, having numerical goals and timetables for employing protected groups, commonly viewed as the core of affirmative action, is rated very important by only 34.3 percent.[2]

Some complementary activities are closely related to training itself, such as organizational assessments that identify issues for training to address. Training providers are commonly involved in some pre-training activities, although the depth of their involvement varies. Involvement once training has been delivered is more limited, with only 38.7 percent reporting that they typically have any followup role.

Benchmarks Defining the Organization Development Approach

Although the previous section has emphasized that diversity training programs typically share many characteristics, they also vary widely in their

style and scope. Based on an analysis of the correlation among survey responses, as well as on-site observation in 14 training programs (Bendick, et al., 1998, Chapter 5), we concluded that much of that variation can be summarized in a single dimension – the degree to which a program conforms to what we label the organization development approach to diversity training. Operationally, we define that approach in terms of the following nine benchmarks.

1. Training Has Strong Support from Top Management. One survey respondent remarked that, if he had to choose between an unlimited budget for diversity training and having the top executive of a client organization simply *insist* that discrimination be banished, he would select the latter. When trainees understand that the managers to whom they report are serious about this subject, they are more likely to participate in training whole-heartedly, apply its lessons, and generalize to situations training did not specifically address – all elements of sustained organizational change. Support can be manifested in numerous ways, for example, by having senior managers attend training, endorse it, repeatedly refer to its lessons, or echo its lessons in employee performance evaluations.

2. Training Is Tailored to Each Client Organization. A number of survey respondents offer "off the shelf," standardized training packages. Although their approach is relatively inexpensive and appeals to employers wishing to delegate diversity work, it can sharply diminish the ability of the training to promote substantial organizational change. Some trainees find it difficult to absorb information if the situations studied do not precisely match their own workplace. More basically, off-the-shelf training may be irrelevant because it fails to match the client firm's corporate culture. Furthermore, the process of working with the training provider to tailor training is often an important part of the client's organizational learning.

Tailoring can involve the style or mode of delivery, selection of topics, examples from the workplace, or other adaptations. At its most elaborate, it involves a pre-training diversity audit identifying the client firm's current circumstances and priority issues. Whether elaborate or simple, tailored training will achieve the goal implied in the informal definition of corporate culture used by many organizational development consultants: Trainees will recognize the training as

relevant to "the way things are done around here" (Harvey and Brown, 1996, p. 67).

3. Training Links Diversity to Central Operating Goals. If a client organization trains merely to salve senior managers' consciences, placate disaffected employees, or reduce the likelihood that an employer will be sued, then organization development theory suggests the effects are likely to be shallow and short-lived. In contrast, if an organization undertakes training to advance its most important operational goals through increased productivity, reduced costs, easier recruitment, enhanced creativity, improved client service, or expanded markets then the effort is likely to be treated more seriously and have a more lasting impact (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998; Richard and Johnson, 1999).

Accordingly, diversity training in the organization development style typically involves training around and discussion of the "business case" for diversity. Frequently, this case is presented in terms of the importance to the firm of customers or employees of different demographic backgrounds. Additionally, research is sometimes quoted to demonstrate empirically the relationship between workforce diversity and business success. For example, one study found that stockholders' five-year total return on investment was 17 percent higher for 50 firms picked as the best companies for minority employees than for other comparably sized companies (Johnson, 1998, p. 96). Another study estimated that stock valuations were lower than expected for firms losing discrimination litigation and higher than expected for firms receiving awards for exemplary affirmative action (Wright, et al., 1995). A third found that firms identified as best-performing companies either objectively (in terms of financial performance) or subjectively (most admired by leading executives) were only one-tenth as likely as other firms to discriminate against older workers (Bendick, et al., 1996, pp. 37-39).

4. Trainers Are Managerial or Organization Development Professionals. Consistent with the organization development approach, trainers with experience managing organizations, education in management, or experience as organization development consultants tend to train in a business-like style and emphasize diversity's contributions to the client organization's operational performance. Personal experience as a member of a group traditionally facing discrimination, if it is

a trainer's sole expertise, cannot substitute for this background.

5. Training Enrolls All Levels of Employees. Senior executives, mid-level managers, and first-line supervisors control many human resource management decisions and also function as opinion leaders in setting an organization's culture. Their enrollment in diversity training is therefore obviously important. But work environments that are unwelcoming or hostile to certain types of workers typically reflect relationships with peers as well as supervisors, and changing corporate culture is ultimately a "360-degree" process in which the attitudes and behavior of non-supervisory employees also play a major role. One survey respondent estimated that a "critical mass" capable of influencing an organization's corporate culture does not start to form until about 25 percent of all personnel at a work site have received training.

6. Training Discusses Discrimination as a General Process. Journalists often portray diversity training as harping on the experiences of specific groups, such as racism experienced by African Americans or sexism encountered by women. Although that is the approach of some trainers, those working in the organization development tradition tend to emphasize general psychological and social processes of inclusion and exclusion, such as stereotyping, ingroup bias, social comfort, and group think (Aigner and Cain, 1977; Darley and Gross, 1983; Krueger and Rothbart, 1988; Word, et al., 1974). While the experiences of specific groups are usually cited as examples, these trainers use a breadth of examples to signal that individuals of many backgrounds – including white males – can be adversely affected by these processes. This broader approach is less likely to exacerbate intergroup tensions, and it addresses the often-subtle and unconscious forms of discrimination prevalent in today's workplace (Jackson, 1992; Bendick, et al., 1994).

When diversity training does not conform to this benchmark, it can easily become embroiled in controversy and conflict that the organization development approach is more likely to avoid. For example, one type of training outside the organization development style reinforces

> One survey respondent estimated that a "critical mass" capable of influencing an organization's corporate culture does not start to form until about 25 percent of all personnel at a work site have received training.

stereotypes by focusing on behavior "typical" of members of different groups.[3] Another characterizes diversity initiatives as reparations for past abuses and implies that women and minorities can advance only at the expense of white males (Chemers, et al., 1995, p. 106; Wentling and Palma-Rivas, 1997, pp. 28-30). A third is stress-inducing or blatantly offensive to many trainees.[4] This benchmark characterizes training programs that avoid such circumstances.

7. Training Explicitly Addresses Individual Behavior. As noted earlier, 95.4 percent of survey respondents identified changing trainees' workplace behavior as a very important goal; however, these respondents' training often focuses on awareness and attitudes, devoting limited attention to behavior itself.

Of course, behavior-oriented training can be narrow and mechanical, providing rigid rules or rote procedures that, while sometimes useful, offer little guidance when employees encounter issues in forms or contexts other than the ones on which they were trained. When conceptually grounded (see Benchmark 6), organization development theory suggests that training that actively engages trainees in developing and practicing new ways of speaking and acting is more likely to affect post-training behavior.

8. Training Is Complemented by Changes in Human Resource Practices. Although important improvements can be achieved by changing individuals' behavior, many diversity problems are embedded in systems and policies beyond individuals' control, such as organizations' procedures for recruitment, hiring, assignment, compensation, training, evaluation, promotion, and dismissal.

In some cases, the most effective way to address such issues is not linked to discrimination itself. For example, training in basic supervisory skills for inexperienced supervisors often reduces inconsistencies in policies, failures of communication, and interpersonal conflicts – changes that disproportionately aid members of groups traditionally experiencing discrimination but improve the working environment for other employees as well. One survey respondent estimated that 60 percent of client organizations hiring him to

address discrimination really have only generic management problems associated with antiquated corporate cultures and operating systems; only 40 percent combine these problems with discrimination *per se.*

Organizational-development-oriented diversity training is likely to make individual trainees aware of these issues and mobilize them as advocates of change. But system changes typically must be initiated by senior management and occur outside of, although parallel to, training itself.

9. Training Impacts the Corporate Culture. In a full organization development approach, activities such as those under Benchmark 8 are part of an even broader process. In this effort, training combines with organizational self-examination, symbolic acts, reforms of policies and procedures, and selective changes in personnel to achieve far-reaching changes in the corporate culture – the interdependent system of beliefs, values, and ways of behaving that are common to a workplace (Greenberg and Baron, 1993, p. 622)

Some workplaces have cultures in which discriminatory attitudes and behavior are not only tolerated but implicitly or explicitly condoned (Roberts and White, 1998; Watkins, 1997). In many more, signals are mixed. For example, the majority of large employers have written policies requiring equal employment opportunity, but these policies are given varying degrees of priority. Widely circulated reputations suggest that some companies are distinctly better places to work than others for minorities, women, and others traditionally facing discrimination (Johnson, 1998; Levering and Moscowitz, 1993). The difference is often a corporate culture in which discriminatory, harassing, or exclusionary behavior is so discordant with norms, values, social rewards, and daily practices that they are unthinkable.

Some indicators of an organization's commitment to building such a culture are found within training itself, including the proportion of employees who receive training, participation of top managers in training, the sequencing of training (whether managers are trained before non-supervisory employees, so that the managers are prepared to reinforce the training), and whether attendance is voluntary or mandatory. Other indicators fall outside of training (see Exhibit 5). Because such efforts often require strategic support from top management and substantial resources over two to five years, they are not to be undertaken lightly. From the experience of organization development professionals, such fundamental approaches may, however, be the only way to address issues of diversity and discrimination completely and permanently.

One major finding of our survey is that diversity training programs in the comprehensive organization development style defined by these nine benchmarks do exist. Our survey included 40 questions that, separately or jointly, directly represented the benchmarks – for example, whether the survey respondent typically includes top managers among trainees, trains employees from only one organization at a time, characterizes productivity enhancement as an important training motive, employs trainers whose primary expertise is management or organization development, engages in post-training followup, and rates improved human resource management practices as an important reinforcement to training. On a scale with possible scores from 0 to 40, the 108 survey respondents scored between 18 and 38, with an average of 27.3. Using 80 percent of the maximum score (32 out of 40) as a cutoff representing substantial conformity to the organization development approach, then one-quarter (24.1%) of survey respondents can be said to train in this style.

The following examples illustrate diversity training in the organization development style as it has recently been implemented in two actual firms.

Owens Corning: Reinvigorating a Staid Corporate Culture

Owens Corning, Inc. (OC) is a manufacturer of fiberglass insulation and other building materials, with 24,000 employees and $4.3 billion in annual revenues. Founded in 1930, the firm enjoyed 50 years of slow but steady growth based on innovative products and promote-from-within management. In the aggressive business climate of the 1980s, however, the firm's conservative style made it a target for a hostile takeover. The recapitalization used to defeat the takeover left the company with a multi-billion-dollar debt that, in turn, made the firm even more conservative (e.g., precluding nearly all hiring for seven years).

In 1992, Glen Hiner, an executive from General Electric, was hired as the first "outsider" Chief Executive Officer in the company's history. He articulated ambitious goals: Transform the firm's product line from components to comprehensive building systems, expand annual sales to $5 billion, increase international sales to 40
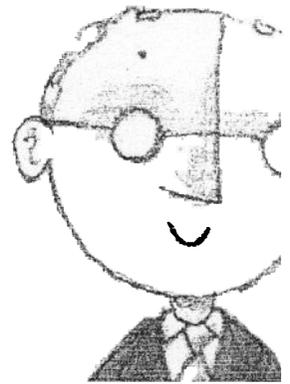
percent of revenues, enhance productivity 6 percent a year, and have profitability grow twice as fast as sales. He radically raised expectations for individual performance and sought profound changes in the firm's staid culture, processes he estimated would take five years or more to institutionalize. Soon the company's historic headquarters had been replaced by an ultra-modern building featuring open offices, half a dozen senior executives had been replaced, and a new sense of possibility pervaded the firm (Stewart, 1997).

For Hiner, diversity was, above all else, a way to support his ambitious goals by promoting broader vision, flexibility, openness to new ideas, and continuous learning. He argued that a more diverse workforce would promote internationalization, assist in penetrating demographically diverse domestic markets, and provide talented employees.

Having made diversity central to his strategy, Hiner became indefatigable in keeping the subject in front of his employees. In his first meeting with senior executives, he bluntly stated, "We are too white and too male, and that will change." In partial fulfillment of that prediction, he appointed two women to the formerly all-male board of directors,[5] and five women, including one woman of color, to the formerly all-male, all-white corps of 50 vice presidents. He ordered that employees' business cards state the company's core values, and this statement sets individual dignity (the base of diversity, as OC conceptualizes it) equal to *customer satisfaction* and *shareholder value*. When he made yearly conferences with the company's top 120 executives a principal mechanism of his leadership, he devoted several days of one early conference to diversity and made it a recurrent theme of others. In reviewing senior-level hiring or promotions, he constantly questioned whether minorities, women, or citizens of other countries were considered as candidates. In senior managers' annual performance reviews, he paid prominent attention not only to financial goals but also to nonfinancial ones, including diversity.

For assistance in these efforts, OC formed a long-term relationship with a for-profit consulting firm led by an individual with 30 years of experience as a diversity consultant. This firm had available more than 35 employees and consultants, and one of the firm's partners spent the majority of his time with OC for five years.

This consulting firm viewed itself not as a deliverer of isolated training events but as an organization development catalyst devising and implementing strategies for cultural change. In this firm's ideal diversity process, training absorbs about one-third of the time and resources. Equal efforts precede training (in assessing issues, developing strategies, and customizing training materials) and follow it (in activities reinforcing training, establishing internal diversity councils, cultivating demographic affinity networks and mentoring processes, and modifying company practices and procedures).

Consistent with this approach, OC's work on diversity has included: (a) the appointment of a corporate Director of Diversity; (b) an organizational assessment, conducted by the consulting firm, using focus groups and individual interviews; (c) presentations to senior management on the assessment and on diversity generally; (d) a day-long dialogue between senior managers and lower-level employees from under-represented groups; (e) planning meetings between the Director of Diversity, Vice President for Human Resources, and the head of each operating division; (f) the establishment of diversity councils at corporate headquarters and branch plants; (g) the development of data systems monitoring the demographic characteristics of the company's workforce; (h) distribution of a first-ever diversity survey to all professional employees; and (i) modifications in company personnel practices (e.g., an electronic bulletin board advertising job vacancies company-wide; giving managers international assignments).

Owens Corning committed itself to providing diversity training to all of its 6,000 salaried employees, and its consulting firm implemented that commitment, in two-day sessions for groups of 25 to 30 trainees, as the OC budget has permitted. The first day of training is devoted to diversity concepts, focusing on eight issues identified in the organizational assessment. On the second day, trainees divide into demographically mixed work teams to design actions

addressing problems discussed the previous day. Shorter training is gradually being provided to non-supervisory employees.

With regard to diversity, OC today is an organization in transition. Although the company's management remains predominantly white and male, women and minorities now occupy several positions unprecedented for them half a dozen years ago. While many employees have yet to receive diversity training and others have passed through it silently unconvinced, many have emerged with broadened understanding. Although informal social networks still keep "outsiders" from feeling fully at home at the firm, and women and minorities continue to rate the firm only "average" as a place to work, many formal company systems have been revamped to enhance their inclusiveness. Among manufacturing plants across the country, the production workforce remains overwhelmingly white and male at some locations but has become substantially more diverse at others (especially new plants, where diversity processes were in place during initial hiring). And while women and minorities still tend to sit apart from their white male coworkers in the cafeteria, crude gender humor and racial epithets on the shop floor have been substantially curtailed. Within a broad process of organization development, diversity training contributed significantly to these results.

Denny's Restaurants: Recovering from a Litigation Disaster

Advantica Restaurant Group, Inc. is not a widely recognized name, despite the company's $2.6 billion in annual revenues and 65,000 employees. Far better known are the 2,500 fast-food and moderately priced restaurants the company owns, operates or franchises as Denny's, Quincy's, El Pollo Loco, Coco's, Carrows, and Hardee's. Started in 1961 with a single hamburger stand, the firm evolved through multiple mergers, bankruptcies, and reorganizations to become the fourth largest food service firm in the United States. Every day, Advantica serves meals to nearly two million customers.

On April 1, 1993, those customers did not include six African-American Secret Service agents who waited for breakfast at a Denny's while their fellow white agents were served ahead of them. Multiple lawsuits triggered by this nationally publicized incident alleged systematic discrimination against African-American

customers, and a nationwide consumer boycott seemed imminent. Further investigation revealed a firm with all-white management, virtually no minority suppliers, and an environment in which racial epithets were common. *Fortune* characterized Denny's during this period as "a shameful model of entrenched prejudice" and "one of America's most racist companies" (Rice, 1996, p. 1).

To settle the lawsuits, Advantica accepted court supervision of Denny's for seven years, distributed $54 million to compensate African-American customers, expanded the number of minority restaurant managers and franchises, and publicized a toll-free telephone line for customer complaints. Simultaneously, upheaval was underway within the corporate leadership. Controlling ownership was purchased by "corporate raider" Kohlberg Kravis Roberts, which installed a new Chief Executive Officer, James Adamson, with a mandate to improve company performance dramatically. Adamson soon replaced 11 of the 12 most senior executives, recruiting replacements with industry experience but no previous ties to Advantica and including women and people of color. His goal was to break from both discrimination and a legacy of provincial, lethargic management (Adamson, 2000).

While senior executives' attitudes might be changed by replacing individuals, the same strategy could not practically be applied to the several thousand managers and assistant managers operating restaurants across the country. Like their counterparts throughout the lower-priced food service industry, these managers typically had risen through experience with the company and internal training, processes emphasizing loyalty to the firm and comfort with its corporate culture. To eliminate attitudes and practices that were formerly part of that culture, retraining would be essential.[6]

This training was mandated for all Denny's managers and employees as part of the litigation settlement. But even before the litigation, Advantica had initiated a "Mission 2000" to develop commonalities among its largely independent restaurant chains, establish the firm as an "employer of choice," and make customer service as important as hygienic food handling. As the firm struggled to find a positive aspect to the litigation that had so shaken the company, it realized that the suit had created a "teachable moment" for these longer-term improvements.
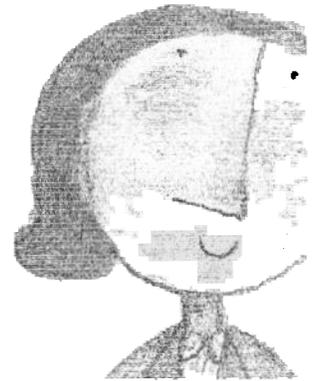
To implement training, Advantica engaged an array of consultants. The process started in 1992, with a short-lived internal diversity committee and employee focus groups. An anthropology professor developed a self-study course on diversity for new managers in the Hardee's and Quincy's chains. A charismatic speaker was brought in for short, awareness-focused presentations, entitled "Harness the Rainbow," to senior executives and franchises. During 1994, a for-profit training vendor delivered one-day diversity awareness workshops to 4,000 employees, including all restaurant managers and assistant managers in Denny's and El Polo Loco.

While this training was generally received politely, feedback suggested that trainees preferred an approach that would move beyond awareness to discuss behavior. Trainees also denigrated the trainers' lack of background in the restaurant industry and classroom exercises not set in restaurants. In response, subsequent training was redesigned to use company internal staff. A racially mixed group of 75 employees was selected as training leaders. They each received six days of training on diversity, interpersonal sensitivity, and training methods from three different consulting firms. These employees then led one-day training sessions around the company, under titles such as "We Can." To date, several thousand restaurant managers and other employees have been trained in groups of 25, and the process continues as resources permit.

The focus of this training is treatment of customers, rather than employees, although the two often intertwine. Sessions are keynoted by a videotape in which the CEO endorses the training. The "business case" for diversity is given prominence, highlighting the purchasing power of different ethnic groups. Anti-discrimination laws are discussed, as is material on customer service adapted from other company training. Examples of problematic incidents are presented on videotape, some reproducing incidents alleged in the litigation, and practical behavioral responses for handling these situations ("scripts" of what to say, "decision trees" concerning what actions to take) are practiced in role-playing exercises.

As the firm struggled to find a positive aspect to the litigation that had so shaken the company, it realized that the suit had created a "teachable moment" for these longer-term improvements.

Today, Advantica remains a company with many problems. Its leveraged buyout still burdens the firm with more than $1 billion in debt, and the cash required to service it limits the resources available for training and other new initiatives. The process of culture change remains incomplete. But the "inexorable zero" representation of protected groups in positions of authority has been dramatically altered, with racial/ethnic minorities now 26 percent of Denny's managerial employees. *Fortune*, which had previously called Denny's one of the country's most racist companies, now describes it as "a model of multicultural sensitivity" (Rice, 1996, p. 1). In terms of rapid change starting from a disastrous situation, it is certainly so, and diversity training in the organization development style deserves an important part of the credit.

Diversity Training's Perceived Impacts

However impressive initiatives such as those at Owens Corning and Denny's may seem, they of course do not conclusively demonstrate that such efforts have substantial benefits either for employers or their employees. Our survey can provide some evidence of the impact of diversity training, although it is based on perceptions rather than objective, independent measurement. We asked survey respondents to estimate the impact of their diversity training work, on a scale from -2 (large negative effect) to +2 (large positive effect). Their responses, summarized in Exhibit 6, claim positive but modest effects; the bottom row of Exhibit 6 reports that, across the 10 topics on which respondents were asked to estimate training's effects, the average response was 1.2 (a small positive effect); the modal response was 1 (a small positive effect).

Survey respondents were asked to consider 10 areas of possible impact of diversity training, and their perceptions varied substantially. Respondents estimated that training's largest effect was on trainees' *awareness* of diversity issues, with a score of 1.6 – the only subject on which the modal response was 2, a large positive effect. Concerning more concrete outcomes – changes in trainees' attitudes and behavior or the client organizations' personnel practices and

EXHIBIT 6

Training Effect on[+]	Mean Score	Modal Score	% Score Negative	Non-OD Score Approach	OD Score Approach
Trainees' awareness of issues	1.6	2	0	1.67	1.59
Use of stereotypes in personnel decisions	1.3	1	0	1.53	1.26
Personnel practices the employer is aware of	1.3	1	0	1.40	1.29
Corporate culture concerning discrimination	1.3	1	1.1	1.48	1.21
Trainees' behavior in the workplace	1.2	1	0	1.44	1.16*
Employees' attitudes toward discrimination	1.2	1	0	1.31	1.18
Hostility among groups in the workplace	1.2	1	1.1	1.39	1.10
Productivity of client organizations	1.1	1	0	1.22	1.03
Employment opportunities for protected groups	.8	1	1.1	1.01	.77
Morale of white males	.6	1	14.1	.99	.51**
Average	1.2	1	1.7	1.34	1.11*

+What are the effects of your training, on the following scale: 2 = large positive effect; 1 = small positive effect;
  0 = no effect; -1 = small negative effect; -2 = large negative effect?
* p < .05   ** P < .01
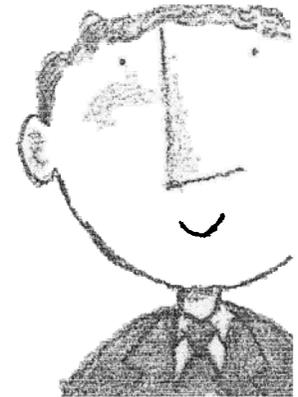
corporate culture – respondents estimated more limited impacts; responses averaged 1.3, with a mode of 1 (small positive). Respondents made still more modest claims for outcomes that might follow from these effects – enhanced productivity (an average score of 1.1) and expanded employment opportunities for protected groups (an average score of .8).

The third column in Exhibit 6 reports the proportion of respondents who estimated that their efforts had negative effects. This proportion is zero (or virtually zero)[7] for every subject except for the morale of white males, where 14.1 percent estimated a small negative effect.

Such responses, of course, reflect the *average* experience of all the diversity trainers surveyed, a group that, as we have emphasized, varied widely in the style and scope of their training programs. Using the nine benchmarks presented earlier in this article as defining the organization development approach and the 40 questions that represented these benchmarks in the survey, we divided our 108 survey respondents into two groups – 26 respondents (24.1%) who implemented the organization development approach relatively thoroughly and consistently, and the remaining 82 respondents (75.9%). The final two columns of Exhibit 6 illustrate that, as diversity trainers perceive it, the organization development approach is associated with more positive effects than other versions of diversity training. According to the exhibit, on all 10 dimensions of impact examined, respondents conforming to

the organization development model rated their effectiveness higher than their non-organization-development counterparts rated their own efforts. The difference averaged .23 points, with a range from .07 (for increasing trainee awareness) to .48 (for improving the morale of white males). Three differences, including that for the average of the 10 dimensions, were statistically significant.[8]

Because the evidence we can present concerning the effects of diversity training is based on perceived benefits rather than impacts rigorously and independently measured, and because these perceptions may be subject to distortion,[9] these results must be considered suggestive rather than definitive. Nevertheless, the modesty of the claims made, and the ways that the claimed impacts seem sensibly related to the scope and style of the training efforts and the types of impacts claimed, lends these estimates additional credibility. Rigorous proof of effectiveness would require a controlled experiment and objective measures of program impacts that are not only well beyond the scope of the present study but may never be available. In this circumstance, it may be appropriate to consider perceptual data on impacts as important evidence of positive impacts, even if it is not definitive proof (Kilpatrick, 1977).

Conclusions

Diversity training appears likely to continue as an important activity in the American workplace. Major trends motivating it – including

changing workforce demographics, accelerating internationalization, and continuing group conflict and litigation – are likely to continue. Many employers are aware of discrimination problems that they have not yet attempted to address.[10] And as legislation and court decisions increasingly limit other anti-discrimination approaches, such as affirmative action, diversity training offers an increasingly important alternative. Consistent with these circumstances, 73.3 percent of our survey respondents reported that they expected demand for diversity training to increase over the next several years.

This article suggests that both workers and employers are likely to benefit from this expansion, even where diversity training is implemented in its most basic and limited forms. It also suggests that the benefits are likely to be more substantial if the efforts embody the organization development approach defined by our nine benchmarks. Particularly to the extent that the entire diversity training industry comes to resemble the organization-development-oriented 25 percent of survey respondents, then this activity can be a valuable component of American strategic human resource management in the 21st century.

Biographical Sketches

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Endnotes

1. When the levels are separated, training is usually tailored to each. For example, one survey respondent offers three options: Diversity Strategy (a two-day course for executives); Tapping the Potential of Diversity (a day-and-a-half course for mid-level managers and supervisors); and Valuing Diversity (a half-day course for non-supervisory employees).

2. As this final finding suggests, an employer's diversity management staff are often administratively separate from the human resources staff responsible for equal employment opportunity and affirmative action programs. A number of diversity training programs we observed began by explicitly differentiating diversity management (described as being driven by business objectives and seeking to include all employees) from affirmative action (described as being driven by government regulations and serving only specified groups of employees).

3. For example, one survey respondent stated that his training describes Hispanics as family-oriented rather than work-oriented and counsels employers to motivate Hispanic employees by appealing to these family interests. In Exhibit 4, 34.6 percent of respondents rated "making the content of stereotypes of protected groups more positive" as an important training goal. Although such efforts may intend to increase understanding among persons with different cultural backgrounds, they reinforce the assumption that all individuals who belong to a group have the same traits. More effective training discourages reliance on stereotypes and emphasizes the importance of understanding individuals. At most, once an individual is known to have a particular trait, that person's cultural background may help to explain why he or she has that trait; but cultural background should not be used to predict that individuals will have a trait. Behavioral scientists emphasize this point by distinguishing *idiographic* from *nomothetic* information (Vogt, 1993, p. 109, 152), but this distinction is not maintained by many diversity trainers.

4. For example, Labich (1996, p. 178), has written:

> For several years, the U.S. Department of Transportation provided the most egregious example of how not to conduct diversity training. The sessions, suspended in 1993 after outraged complaints from employees, included a gauntlet where men were ogled and fondled by women. Blacks and whites were encouraged to exchange racial epithets, people were tied up together for hours...

5. Reflecting Hiner's broad definition of diversity, he selected women who would diversify the board in more than a gender sense. One is expert in materials technology and the other in retailing, perspectives other directors did not possess.

6. Non-training steps that Advantica initiated to support culture change included: placing the firm's Chief Diversity Officer on the firm's management committee; placing five women or persons of color on the 12-member board of directors; modifying personnel practices, both formal and informal; expanding sources from which employees are recruited; establishing minority procurement agreements with African-American and Hispanic civil rights organizations; conducting focus groups to probe minority consumers' attitudes; redesigning advertising to feature non-white customers; and dismiss-
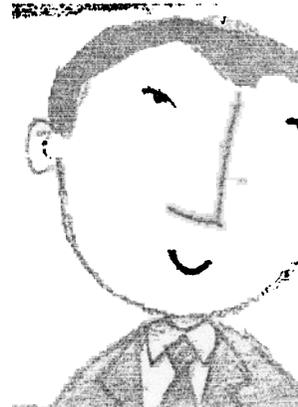
ing some employees who were not adapting to the new culture.

7. "Virtually zero" refers to the three questions to which there was a negative response from one respondent (1.1%), who was the source of all three negative responses.

8. Our analysis of 14 specific training programs on which we conducted on-site case study research provides additional evidence suggesting the greater effectiveness of diversity training in the organizational development style. In the one case among the 14 where we rated training as having a major positive impact, the training approach met 87.5 percent of the nine benchmarks; in seven cases of moderate positive impact, it averaged 82.5 percent; and in six cases of little or no impact, it averaged 52.1 percent (Bendick, et al., 1998, p. 85).

9. As a provider of diversity training, respondents' financial self-interest probably has a positive bias on their perceptions of training impacts. In addition, the principle of cognitive dissonance suggests that individuals tend to view activities more favorably when they have invested time and effort in them (Myers, 1990, pp. 53-54). Consistent with this concern are the results of one survey in which human resource professionals and non-human resource managers were asked to rate workforce diversity programs. The average rating by human resource professionals was 2.6 out of a possible 5.0, while that by other managers was 1.9 (CCH, 1995a, p. 93). To minimize such a bias, our survey asked about effects on specific topics rather than overall effects; our analysis emphasizes the variation among responses rather than their absolute level; and in 14 case studies, we, rather than training providers, rated training effects, relying largely on the views of training clients rather than providers.

10. For example, in a confidential survey of 645 senior HR executives, 55 percent of respondents voiced concerns about the ability of supervisors in their firm to motivate diverse employees, 29 percent described discrimination as a continuing problem in their firm, and 2 percent agreed that their firm's corporate culture was not open to diversity. Fewer than half of the respondents acknowledging each problem indicated that their firm had current plans to do anything about it (Towers Perrin, 1990). Similarly, in a survey of 1,045 private-sector firms, only 5 percent of respondents felt that their companies were currently doing a good job of managing the diversity of their work forces (Rice, 1994, p. 79).