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Choose the Equitable Option

Designing and delivering inclusive training requires applying an equity lens to the experience.

BY INGEBORG KROESE

As businesses increasingly acknowledge the importance of a diverse workforce and inclusive work environment, talent development's role has mainly involved supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging programs such as unconscious bias training or through the development support of specific marginalized groups such as women's leadership programs. However, companies still allocate significantly larger investments to general training programs such as communication, team building, negotiations, sales, or management training.

The Association for Talent Development's *DEI&B Education for Employees* research report indicates that 44 percent of organizations have no formal DEI&B training budget, and 30 percent spend less than \$100 annually on DEI&B training compared to the \$1,300 that companies spend on all training per employee annually. My doctoral research suggests that organizations see those general programs as sex, gender, race, and ethnicity neutral because they purportedly treat everybody the same.

That assumption is problematic because those social categories affect training experiences and outcomes in significant ways. My research shows that work environments can have dominant masculine cultures, creating gendered barriers for women to implement training. In addition, women have less access to employer-supported training and during training, a group's gender composition influences participation. My research further indicates that gender stereotypes and biased behaviors influence learning and that training materials can strengthen stereotypes. The result is that training

may be less relevant and effective depending on a participant's gender, indicating the need for equitable training.

What it is

Equitable training means recognizing and addressing the barriers that people face before, during, and after training because of their sex, gender, race, or other social category. But how can trainers view their courses, curriculum, and learning experience at large through the lens of equity?

To ensure their training is equitable, trainers and instructional designers must have essential knowledge about DEI&B, such as the meaning of diversity, inclusion, and belonging; a comprehension of (hidden) sexism and racism; the difference between sex and gender; the difference between equality and equity; what inclusive language is; and the meaning of intersectionality. Based on that enhanced understanding, training facilitators and designers can investigate the impact that race, gender, and other social categories can have on what and how they train.

How it works

Three elements affect training transfer: the work environment, the training participant, and the training design. My research reveals how sex and gender affect those elements. In the work environment, gender role stereotypes mean additional barriers for women to be seen as, for example, credible leaders, sales managers, or supervisors. Those gendered realities may mean that training needs and priorities for a female account manager,



CHECKLIST Audit Your Training for Equity



Think equity, not equality or treating everybody the same.



Ensure you have foundational knowledge about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

hotel executive, or project leader are different from their male counterparts.

Sex and gender may affect how participants experience role plays and exercises, especially when in a minority position during a training program. It likewise can affect what is a safe location and convenient time for training. For example, is it safe for women to travel alone by public transport to and from the training site?

Once you know how race, gender, and other social categories influence what and how you train, you can address it and take the equity lens in curriculum development when deciding on the program's access criteria and logistics, content and design, facilitation, and evaluation.

Guidelines

Applying the equity lens means asking yourself three questions before your next training event. Similar to an audit, these questions can help you unearth and address inequities baked into the learning experience.

Who is invited? Consider, for example, training logistics: Does the timing consider care responsibilities, which women still mostly manage? Do the invitation's language and images suggest the program is relevant for all, or do you only speak to the majority? Are the criteria to attend biased, unnecessarily favoring the majority's experiences? For instance, are only employees with five years or more of sales leadership positions eligible to attend the course when most sales leaders are men? Would that reinforce the status quo?

Whose realities are reflected? Consider the theory, images, cases, exercises, and language used in the training course. Are they inclusive? Do they also reflect the experiences of minorities?

Let's look at the example of a negotiation training course. Research shows that female negotiators may face a double bind. That means many women are seen as assertive negotiators but judged negatively because they act outside of female gender norms. Or perhaps

RESOURCES

Dixon-Fyle, S., K. Dolan, V. Hunt, and S. Prince. 2020. *Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters*. mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters.

Kroese, I. 2022. "Is Employee Training Really Gender-Neutral? Introducing a Sex/Gender-Sensitive Model of Training." *Human Resource Management Review*. doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2021.100890.

Ray, V. 2019. "A Theory of Racialized Organizations." *American Sociological Review* 84(1): 26–53.

they act in line with female gender norms, and consequently, others perceive them as weak and not a good negotiator.

As a trainer, you can ignore the double bind that female negotiators face, which results in facilitating the steps of negotiations while ensuring you treat all participants the same. However, the equitable option is to discuss and address the double bind during the training program. It will also help to break down the fences that created the inequity in the first place. To ensure you do not overlook something that critical, do your research to understand, recognize, and address that the realities of your training participants are affected by gender, race, and other social categories.

Who benefits most? Measure diversity and inclusiveness when you evaluate your course. Analyze the feedback, for example, by gender. And recognize intersectionality or whether, for instance, the feedback from women of color is different from the feedback from White women. Ask participants how inclusive the program was, and whether it recognized their realities.

Results

My research shows that participants' sex and gender can affect satisfaction with the training program; its relevance; the ability to transfer the training; and, as a result, career progression. I have found that ignoring sex and gender in training has a negative impact on women.

When facilitators and instructional designers ensure that their training programs are equitable, they support DEI&B strategies and help build a more diverse and inclusive work environment.

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Recognize and address the impact of sex and gender and other social categories.



Ask yourself: Who is invited, whose realities are reflected, and who benefits most.