

Summary of discussion question #1 for Week 7:

*Consider the following statements: Just as governments can not legislate morality, employer-organizations can not mandate cultural homogeneity and inclusiveness. You can not force people to like each other. Therefore, diversity initiatives and training are a waste of time.*

*Do you agree or disagree? Have you experienced successes or failures of diversity initiatives in your own workplace? If so, please share the details.*

The aggregate opinion of class members who responded to this discussion topic is that diversity initiatives are worthwhile. A few class members focused on how employer-organizations can mandate cultural homogeneity and inclusiveness, while Margueret Spencer wisely observed, “[W]e should be trying to figure out how to lead and manage in the face of tension caused by differences.” Margueret continued,

“The distinction Janet [Smith] makes between tolerance and respect is very enlightening. Bolman and Deal (p 154) discuss building diversity as something that needs to be brought into day-to-day management. The circumstances . . . suggest diversity . . . already existed, but it was how the leader . . . handled it that created a reaction from the minorities . . . [R]espect, not just tolerance, is what it takes . . . Promoting diversity with inclusiveness acts like affirmative action is only one step toward creating a truly diverse world. It is a leader's job to instill in his/her staff a respect for these differences once they're confronted with them.”

There was a general consensus that Maine residents and natives historically have not had exposure to social diversity initiatives, so they do not have a frame of reference to apply in a multicultural workplace. Some class members shared interesting and very personal anecdotes about their experiences with social diversity and the process of coming to terms with demographic differences within their own ethnic groups. Catherine Pinkham's experience with training housekeepers with broad-ranging language and cultural differences was especially enlightening because she implemented a realistic initiative based on her observations, not a “canned suggestion from a diversity guru,” as Billie McNamara quipped.

A handful of posts discussed women in non-traditional careers after Janet Smith likened diversity initiatives to historic initiatives to encourage women to apply for traditionally male jobs.

Elizabeth Randall commented on the plethora of diversity issues that go unobserved because they are within traditionally homogeneous groups, such as family units. Pauline Mateyko wrote about preconceptions we all have, even about individuals from our own ethnic, cultural, or socio-economic groups. Pauline observed that prejudices arising from stereotypes would likely affect the interactions and free-flow sharing between members of this HRD633 class.

Margueret Spencer noted, “[D]iversity training and initiatives require capital investments and calculations of the return on these investments are difficult to determine, thus employer-organizations are reluctant to dedicate time and dollars to diversity training and initiatives.” Pauline Mateyko suggested changing the titles of diversity training courses could make them more palatable and successful. Elizabeth Randall recognized the “thin divide between recognizing differences and creating a Us vs Them” scenario, which is a concern among many employer-organizations as they implement diversity initiatives and training.

Margueret Spencer also commented, “[A]nthropological findings suggest that in being instinctive the behavior of banding/grouping/cliquishness is difficult, if not impossible, for employer-organizations to overcome.” Nicole Camire questioned whether unawareness is equivalent to discrimination: If the objectifier and/or the recipient have no knowledge that discrimination is occurring, is it really discrimination? If so, should employer-organizations work to educate both parties? Would that create the situation Elizabeth Randall described?

Rosmond Hodge wrote, “Knowing is half the battle” and agreed with Nicole Camire that first-hand experiences are best. Rosmond continued,

“Perhaps that is because we understand through sharing – belief, activity, or even a particular hardship. This knowledge is only genuinely shared when we feel comfortable with the issue and that requires a safe environment. Diversity initiatives would serve to shed light on some of the cultural differences, and approaches but this is not going to guarantee a more productive work relation than homogeneous workforce.”

Nicole Camire remarked on her work experiences in Maine and California, noting she had no personal knowledge of diversity initiatives or training in the workplace. Nicole posited that exposure to individuals from other cultures or groups is the best diversity initiative, *e.g.*, a way to develop appreciation and respect. Janet Smith shared an anecdote that reinforced for us that all people want to be respected, not just tolerated as so many diversity initiatives teach.

Margueret Spencer wrote about the necessity of employers to enforce respect, which Nicole Camire confirmed would probably be easier than changing individuals' behavior and beliefs. Rosmond Hodge observed that employer-organizations would be better served by challenging workers to attain goals than resolve personal differences with coworkers, because demographic diversity adds layers of perspective when problem-solving or “fine-tuning.”

Billie McNamara shared the results of her research on the failure of diversity initiatives and training: The primary reasons diversity initiatives don't work are 1) incomplete stakeholder buy-in; and, 2) attempting to force-feed a one-size-fits-all, generic program instead of tailoring it to the needs of the situation and constituents. Billie shared a recent article and a comprehensive, longitudinal study that address the failure of diversity training in the workplace:

Kalev, A., Dobbin, F. & Kelly, E. (2006). Best practices or best guesses? Assessing the efficacy of corporate affirmative action and diversity policies. *American Sociological Review* 71(4), 589-617. N.B. -- In a Stanford University review of this study subsequently reported by the *Wall Street Journal* in January, 2007, Dr. Kalev was quoted as stating that diversity training fails.

Metzler, C. J. (2003). Top ten reasons why diversity initiatives fail. *Diversity in Practice* 11(2), n.p.