

**THE EFFICACY OF DIVERSITY TRAINING
IN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

By
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A Thesis

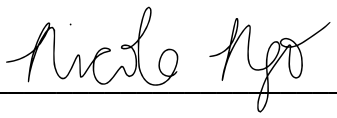
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This study explores the outcomes of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training in nonprofit organizations. This study aims to determine which aspects of diversity training lead to increased awareness about DEI or tangible improvements, and which factors are more detrimental to the goals of DEI. Open ended interviews were conducted with 18 nonprofits in the Pacific Northwest, where participants were asked about their experiences with DEI trainings and workshops. Data were then coded for several key themes related to DEI. This research suggests that diversity training can be a successful tool to increase DEI engagement if intentionally designed with longevity and opportunities for dialogue, actionable steps, with an organization-specific focus in mind, and if facilitated by an expert.

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Introduction

Often providing services that would otherwise not exist, the nonprofit sector is focused on the provision of equity-related services to those who are not served by the private and government sector. In order for a nonprofit to best serve the community around them, having an equitable organizational structure is necessary. An organization's internal structure is rooted primarily in its policies and procedures, which then lay the foundation for workplace culture and employee attitudes about the workplace. In order to improve organizational structure many organizations use diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) trainings as a tool to increase their ability to serve their community. In light of the Black Lives Matter movement and increased awareness about DEI issues, many nonprofit organizations are redoubling their efforts to foster an equitable and representative climate. A contributing factor to the structural inequity is the distinct lack of people of color in top leadership roles and challenging of existing organizational norms. For example, only 8% of executive directors of nonprofits are people of color (Medina, 2017). Although this is not the focus of this research, it is important to note that this "leadership gap cannot be attributed to differences in backgrounds, qualifications, aspirations, skills, or preparation. Rather, the issue is structural" (Walker, 2019). It is these structural issues that diversity training aims to target.

This research explores the efficacy of diversity training and, more specifically, which aspects of diversity training contribute to improvements in DEI. This research question stems from discrepancies found in the literature about the efficacy of diversity training. Several studies have reported the effectiveness of diversity training in educating staff on proper language and best practices, however others report that diversity training results in few long term changes in behavior. Lastly, some studies indicate that diversity training results in frustration amongst staff, ultimately damaging DEI efforts within the organization. For

example, the literature indicates diversity trainings implemented based on predetermined guides or executed with online programs tend to have little to no effect (Walker, 2019). In contrast, diversity training that focuses on small-group discussions facilitated by trained professionals is far more effective and result in long-term changes in DEI related issues (Kulik et al, 2007). Consequently, a better understanding of how nonprofits structure diversity trainings will aid in efforts to increase awareness around DEI issues. This research focuses on the efficacy of diversity training and strives to develop suggested action steps that nonprofits implementing diversity training can take.

Literature review

This section reviews both effective and ineffective diversity practices among nonprofits by comparing and contrasting different approaches to DEI trainings.

History

The rapid influx of novel diversity initiatives further highlights the distinct lack of consensus in both the scientific and professional world. While “training is one of the most common activities included in diversity initiatives” (Kulik et al., 2007), it is by no means the only strategy nonprofits can take to address diversity. Dating back to the 1960s, diversity trainings and seminars aim to reduce inequalities, boost employee productivity, educate staff on DEI matters, and foster an inclusive environment. While the initial goal of diversity training in the 1960s focused solely on gender and race, the definition of diversity has rapidly expanded. Now, “primary dimensions such as race, gender, physical abilities, age, and sexual orientation are distinguished from secondary dimensions because they are more likely to be visible or mostly unchangeable, whereas the secondary dimensions such as education,

function, geography, thinking and communication styles may equally advantage or disadvantage an employee but are not immutable” (Anand & Winters, 2008).

Ineffective Diversity Practices

1.1 Delivery

A substantial portion of the conflict related to diversity training is associated with implementation. While a well-meaning manager may encourage conversation about DEI issues, when implemented incorrectly, it can backfire. Walker notes that “disingenuous attempts to create change by simply filling seats often created a culture completely void of inclusion and missed opportunities to experience the benefits of diversity” (Walker, 2019). This is a central theme in the published literature and highlights the importance of sincerity and intention in diversity trainings. When addressing sensitive and highly personal experiences, reading off a script or dismissing the activities as corporate mandated can invalidate the experiences of participants. Additionally, acknowledging that a training or seminar is only happening because it is mandated provides participants with the feeling that they must just “get through it.”

Understanding the attitudes of employees coming into a diversity training workshop or training is just as important as the design of the training itself. For example, “many employees perceive equal opportunity programs as offering an unfair advantage to the non-traditional employee, rather than leveling the playing field for all” (Kulik et al., 2007). For a diversity training to be successful, this must be acknowledged without judgment so that the participants do not feel their opinion is being disregarded. This requires the moderator to be nonreactive to unpopular or potentially harmful opinions, and take time to acknowledge each participant’s experiences and feelings. Some employees may describe diversity training “as ‘punishment for the insensitive’ (Rossett & Bickham, 1994) and some employees feel that

these programs unfairly blame white men for the problems experienced by women and members of racial minority groups (Flynn, 1999)” (Kulik et al., 2007). These attitudes are not uncommon and tend to be expressed by the people most frequently perpetrating DEI-related problems.

The question of this research then shifts from “is diversity training effective” to “how can we make diversity training effective, particularly for the people who need it most.” This highlights a point brought up by Paluck and Green: often, when diversity training is not made mandatory, those in attendance are already passionate about DEI and are motivated to actively participate (Paluck & Green, 2009).

1.2 Voluntary vs Mandated

Making diversity trainings mandatory is yet another contentious issue within the design and implementation of diversity training. While some organizations choose to implement companywide trainings, generally, those in charge of promotions, hiring and lay-offs are considered the most important targets of diversity training. The stipulation that employees participate in diversity training is shown to lead to many of the attitudes discussed above; employees may feel like their time is being wasted with company mandated programs or worse, have their experiences invalidated in a poorly designed diversity training (Walker, 2019).

In contrast, voluntary training often leads to better immediate results: people who are pro-diversity tend to engage more and respond with positive feedback (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Yet, many argue that a well-designed diversity training will effectively engage those who are skeptical about the importance of DEI related topics. Additionally, to avoid lawsuits, many organizations mandate diversity training. So, while research suggests that the most

benefit occurs when diversity trainings are voluntary, a large portion of nonprofit and corporate organizations that require effective models of mandatory diversity training.

This is another aspect of design to consider when planning and implementing diversity training. While mandatory diversity training may (forcibly) capture the attention of those who need it the most, it may backfire and lead to the negative attitudes discussed above. In contrast, making diversity training voluntary limits the scope and effect of the training and leaves out a crucial portion of the intended audience. There is little empirical evidence to back up claims on either side of this decision.

1.3 Content

The content of a DEI training is equally important to the success of a DEI training. One contentious approach to diversity training encourages the suppression of stereotypes and pushes participants to actively ignore or dismiss stereotypes as they become aware of them. Similar to the idea of being “color blind” to race, approaching DEI matters by dismissing the differences that have caused societal problems is generally acknowledged as outdated. A study conducted by Kulik et al (2000) found that “business students who watched diversity training videos instructing them to suppress negative thoughts about the elderly evaluated older job candidates less favorably than did students who did not receive suppression instructions” (Paluck & Green, 2009). This is a specific strategy that should be avoided when conducting diversity trainings.

Effective Diversity Practices

While the discussion about ineffective diversity training practices is substantial, there is a comparably large body of literature showing encouraging results. Previous studies found that managers who participated in diversity training rated DEI as more important than

untrained managers (Paluck & Green, 2009). This shows that, at a minimum, DEI trainings can change attitudes about the importance of DEI.

2.1 Frequency/Planning

For example, “in a thorough review of the diversity training literature, Kulik and Roberson (in press) concluded that, with sufficient attention to pre-training needs assessment and post-training organizational support, diversity training has a positive impact on employee knowledge and behavior” (Kulik et al., 2007). Kulik and Roberson’s review highlights two crucial points; an organization must be assessed prior to the implementation of diversity training, and themes addressed in the training must be reinforced by the organization in the following months/years. A central theme across the literature addressing the efficacy of diversity training is the need for unique trainings that cater to the specific needs of the organization. The more specific and specialized the training, the more likely the messages are to resonate with participants.

2.2 Consultant

While diversity training in itself is a fairly recent development in the nonprofit sector, prejudice reduction and understanding of differences in the workplace are well acknowledged. Numerous consulting firms have made a business out of facilitating difficult conversations in the workplace, and more recently, running diversity trainings. This highlights an important step in the process of planning a diversity training workshop or seminar. Essentially, “boards and leadership teams also should be mindful of whether they have the internal capacity to facilitate these conversations or whether an external consultant might be needed to help create a ‘safe space’ for everyone to lean in and have courageous conversations” (Walker, 2019). DEI topics are often sensitive and emotion-laden, and power dynamics can interfere when management runs a diversity training, adding another layer of

unwanted complexity and expectation. An external consultant enters the conversation as a neutral party whose purpose is solely to facilitate productive conversation.

2.3 Context

Acknowledging the hesitancy or resistance participants feel about attending diversity training can help during the planning process. Oftentimes, if the organization is not focused on equity already, switching into the mindset of DEI related topics can feel removed from organizational goals. A lot of diversity training “content [makes] little connection to how the recommended changes in behavior would improve business results” (Anand & Winters, 2008). Designing DEI training that does not focus solely on the moral necessity of DEI will also make the training more palatable for participants. Highlighting the specific ways in which an organization will achieve professional or organizational goals contextualizes the diversity training and ties it directly back to the organization. This may be a particularly challenging aspect of training design because those who are passionate about DEI matters do not necessarily need this context.

2.4 Existing Issues

The question of the efficacy of diversity training is further complicated by the composition of organizations that choose to implement it in the first place. Notably, DEI experts suggest that people with positive attitudes about equity are more likely to opt in to diversity training (Paluck & Green, 2009). When considering the nonprofit sector’s tendency to be community focused and mission driven, often times the commitment to equity is there but the resources to address it are not. This ties back to the central question of this research: is diversity training the most effective tool to address DEI matters?

There have been very few empirical studies of diversity training in controlled, experimental environments. The broader study of prejudice and prejudice reduction,

discussed in Paluck and Green's 2009 literature review, is more widely studied. Paluck and Green note that "cooperative learning emerges as an important tool for breaking down boundaries between students" (Paluck & Green, 2009). While this evidence is related to prejudice reduction as a whole, the implication is that this knowledge may provide key insights on designing DEI training.

In summary, the evolving and expanding issues surrounding DEI matters present novel and socially relevant avenues of research. Nonprofits face increasing pressures to address DEI matters with little empirical evidence about the efficacy of diversity training. Some argue that DEI training is successful because it breaks down stereotypes, while others "argue that such workshops reinforce stereotypes and elicit reactance among the most prejudiced participants. Neither of these conflicting arguments is backed by the type of evidence that would convince a skeptic." (Paluck & Green, 2009). The goal of this study is to determine what specific action steps nonprofits can take to see improvements in attitudes and practices related to DEI.

Methods

3.1 Participants

Eighteen employees from nonprofit organizations were interviewed and each participant was compensated for their time with a \$50 VISA gift card. Participants were asked to interview only if they had participated in some form of diversity training or diversity initiative within their organization. There were no criteria regarding the type of nonprofits to sample, but the focus was to consider nonprofits of various sizes and topics since these factors could influence challenges to address DEI. Nonprofit organizations represented a variety of focuses, including healthcare, arts, community engagement, and welfare services.

Interviews were open-ended with organizations located in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and California. Participants were recruited through contacts at the University of Oregon and snowball sampling, where participants recommended other nonprofits that would be interested in participating. Participants recruited through snowball sampling accounted for approximately 35% of the interviewees, leading to a concentration of participants from Oregon and surrounding states. 72.2% of interviewees worked at organizations that were staffed by 30 or fewer people. This includes full time and part time employees, but excludes contractors.

Interviewees were asked 14 questions with appropriate clarifying questions following any unclear answers. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. No demographic data were collected. The interview questions were piloted beforehand and informed by two informal interviews that took place with full-time employees of a nonprofit and a corporate entity respectively. This was done to ensure that interview questions prompted the desired responses. The interview questions were designed to provide some baseline quantitative data (e.g., number of people at the organization) before leading to broader, qualitative data. Questions were categorized into the following topics: 1. Questions about the nonprofit itself 2. Defining DEI 3. Components of DEI Trainings 4. Effects of DEI Trainings (See Table 1 for questions). Current literature indicates that DEI trainings can be harmful if executed poorly, but beneficial when done right. These questions were chosen to reflect the underlying questions guiding this research: does diversity training lead to an increased awareness about equity, what tangible change can people observe as a result of DEI trainings, and what aspects led to beneficial change.

Once the Zoom call began, participants were thanked for their time and reminded of the topic of the interview. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the research project or the interview. After this, participants were informed of the

confidentiality practices and what will happen to any data related to the interview. Once interviewees were informed the interviews would be recorded, the recording and the interview began. See Table 1 for interview questions.

Table 1:

#	Interview Question	Follow Up
Questions about the Nonprofit Itself		
1	How many people are employed at your organization?	
2	Can you rate how diverse your organization is on a 5 point scale? <i>(with 5 being very diverse and 1 being not diverse at all)</i>	
Defining DEI		
3	Which of the following attributes do you think are most important to a diverse workplace?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse staff (age, income, race, ethnicity, religion, gender) • Policies related to equity • Well established HR department • Employee attitudes about diversity • Diversity Trainings • Zero Tolerance Policies • Other
4	Of the attributes you checked, which have been successful implemented at your organization?	
5	Which of those attributes does your workplace need to improve on? Why?	
6	What cultures/mindsets prevent a diverse workplace from forming?	
7	In what ways does the <u>climate</u> of your workplace feel welcoming and open to diverse perspectives?	
Components of Diversity Training		

8	Does your organization have the scope and resources to implement effective diversity training?	
9	Has your organization held any staff wide diversity trainings?	How long were the trainings? What did the training address? What stuck out to you? How frequently do these trainings occur? Was an outside consultant or contractor brought in?
Effects of Diversity Training		
10	What positive effects did the diversity training have on the organization?	
11	What positive effects did the diversity training have on staff morale or commitment to equity?	
12	What negative effects did the diversity training have on the organization?	
13	What negative effects did the diversity training have on staff morale or commitment to equity?	
14	What gaps remain that you wish had been addressed during the diversity training?	

After the interview ended, participants were asked to confirm their email for compensation purposes. Emails and associated names were stored on a separate document unlinked from the recordings and notes taken during the interview. Participants were compensated with a \$50 Visa Gift card that was distributed via email. Once all participants were compensated, the document with names and emails was deleted and scrubbed from the computer hard drive. The audio from the Zoom recording was saved and stored on an encrypted hard drive. Data was encrypted using VeraCrypt software. Audio recordings were coded with unique numbers and participant names were withheld from the notes. Any notes

that were taken during the interview process were linked to their associated recording with that number. Participant names were not stored anywhere in the notes. The video and all other associated data from the Zoom recording were scrubbed from the computer immediately after the interview concluded. All personal information kept for compensation purposes and recordings were scrubbed from the computer using the Eraser software.

3.2. Data Analysis

Once all of the interviews had been conducted, the notes and recordings taken during the interviews were coded for major themes. The interviews were coded to determine whether or not diversity training had an effect on the organization and what specific aspects of DEI training were successful and detrimental. Additionally, interviews were further coded based on the impact that a consultant had on the outcome of DEI training. This was added to the initial research question due to the literature indicating the importance of a consultant, and the goal was to determine if consultants correspond with better outcomes as a whole or to specific outcomes, such as longevity of DEI programming. Primary, secondary, and tertiary codes were used, and are further described in Table 2. If a comment that an interviewee made was related, for example, to a change in attitude and a resulting change in organizational operation, its primary code was increased awareness, and its secondary was tangible change. Comments that were coded under successful aspects were specifically related to components of DEI training that participants explicitly mentioned were positive for the organization. This is distinct from comments that had primary codes under tangible change, which relates only to change in the organization.

Table 2: Codes

Code	Description
Increased Awareness	A change of attitude

Tangible Change	Change in the organization
Consultant	Impact consultant had on DEI training
Successful Aspects	Aspects of diversity training that led to positive changes in the organization
Detrimental Aspects	Aspects of diversity training the led to negative changes in the organization

Once all of the interviews had been coded secondary themes were pulled out of each code (as described in Table 3). For example, most of the comments that were coded for Increased Awareness mentioned safety. These secondary themes are discussed in detail in the Discussion section. This was done in order to understand what specific outcomes diversity training had. If this step had been skipped the broader categories that were initially coded would suggest that diversity training does lead to increased awareness and organizational change, but would not point to the specific outcomes the latter half of the research question aims to answer.

Table 3: Secondary Codes

Secondary Code	Description
Increased Awareness	
Change in workplace culture	Employee attitudes about the importance of DEI improved
Confidence	Greater sense of confidence and familiarity with DEI
Tangible Change	
Positive attitude change/sense of safety	Employees were more receptive to DEI trainings and less fearful or uncomfortable
Analysis of organizational structures	Challenging existing norms or habits
Successful Aspects	
Organizational context	Contextualize DEI around the organization’s mission or current goals

Groupwork	Opportunities for group discussion/roleplay activities
Frequency	Reoccurring trainings
Leadership buy-in	Having support and participation from leadership
Detrimental Aspects	
Facilitation	Poor/inexperienced facilitation leading to bad outcomes
Follow through	No follow through or actionable takeaways
Intention	Box checking activity or half hearted training not backed by leadership
Consultant	
Facilitation	Organization specific training catering to specific goals and employees
Expertise	Experience and knowledge

Results

Interviews were coded for 5 major themes: increased awareness, tangible change, successful aspects (that resulted from DEI trainings), detrimental aspects, and the impact of a consultant.

4.1 Increased Awareness

Increased awareness about the importance of DEI was most often described in terms of a shift in workplace culture and was coded 17 times. The most common secondary code associated with this theme was a *change in workplace culture* or, more specifically, a discussion about the structure and character traits of the organization. For many of the interviewees, even if diversity training did not lead to any tangible change in the organization, it helped motivate conversation on the topic. One interviewee mentioned that DEI “is ingraining into our conversations so therefore it is becoming a part of our psyche as an organization.” This is representative of many participants’ experiences with diversity training. These responses suggest that DEI training integrates a lens of equity into broader

organizational goals and decisions and builds trust between employees. This research suggests that diversity training may lead to newfound attention to DEI and act as a teambuilding exercise, resulting in increased awareness and trust.

In addition to shifts in language and underlying goals, the increased awareness about DEI was associated with an increase in *confidence* among participants. One interviewee noted that “having a set of tools that introverts (now) can use to maintain a sense of safety for themselves as well as help create and maintain safety and trust and equity within the space, they are in was really vital.” For some organizations that had never addressed DEI before, these conversations brought DEI into the forefront of people’s minds and encouraged a new way of thinking. This suggests that increased awareness is the first change an organization will see from DEI training and that DEI training could be an effective tool for building the foundational structure that more involved DEI work can build on. Whether there is longevity or actionable change as a result of DEI training is dependent on several factors addressed in the following sections.

4.2 Tangible Change

Tangible change was coded 16 times. The most commonly mentioned secondary codes were a *positive attitude change* about DEI and an *increased sense of safety*. For many organizations, the primary purpose of diversity training is to act as a catalyst for change. However, before any policies or structures can be changed, it is beneficial to have employee attitudes in alignment with those broader goals. The high percentage of participants who noted an increased sense of *safety* following diversity trainings suggests that trainings may be a beneficial tool to build trust between staff members and start a dialogue about DEI. The *positive attitude changes* associated with increased trust suggest that creating a space where employees feel heard and respected means that future DEI workshops or policy changes are

less likely to be perceived as a response to poor behavior and instead understood as forward progress in DEI. In contrast, if participants enter a training or workshop in a defensive headspace, it may become difficult to facilitate change.

Several participants also noted how DEI trainings led to an increase in openness between staff members. Notably, “conversations are happening that wouldn’t have happened otherwise.” The shared sense of *safety* that resulted from the organization’s DEI programming led to staff members sharing their personal stories and experiences with one another. While mixing personal and professional is uncomfortable for some people, this research indicates that this sense of personal community at work is beneficial to DEI. One participant noted that “the idea of blurring the line between the personal and professional has been challenging for folks. . . for some people what they want to do is show up for work and then turn off and leave their work and be at home.” Several participants mentioned pushback due to these feelings, however this research suggests that a separation of personal and professional goals is less beneficial for DEI. This indicates that finding a balance where people can share their personal feelings and goals while still maintaining a sense of professionalism is important.

The second most common secondary theme under *tangible change* was related to *analysis of organizational structures* and policies. Several organizations specifically looked at the language used in their handbooks, websites and policies. One participant noted that, due to the DEI training their organization engaged in, they were “recognizing the language that we’re using wasn’t inclusive like we thought it would be.” This mindset of learning and reanalyzing organizational content was mentioned by several participants and suggests that DEI training can lead to actionable changes. Analysis through the lens of white supremacy was mentioned by several participants. Participants suggested that without an underlying understanding of how white supremacy influences power dynamics, it is difficult to rework

policy and organizational structure. Particularly in the Pacific Northwest, where the majority of participants in this study work, an understanding of white supremacy and local history is critical in rectifying the institutional and cultural problems associated with the region. In nonprofits with missions related to addressing racism, one participant noted that “it’s easy to say, ‘we’re doing the right thing to dismantle racist things in society’ and because of that it’s a little bit more challenging [to address problems related to race internally].” When nonprofits focused on equity and equality face the realization that their own organizational structures are based on the structures that benefit white people, and disadvantage people of color, there is often a reactive and personal response. This suggests that harmful or reactive comments may be made during a DEI training, and that the facilitator should anticipate to mediate these conversations.

Several participants also mentioned changes in hiring and recruitment practices as a result of diversity training. These analyses and changes in organizational structure are the tangible deliverables of DEI training that many organizations strive to see. This research suggests that these outcomes are possible. The changes in policy or language that participants noted occurred *after* the completion of the initial DEI training. This suggests that following through on these themes addressed in DEI training are important when trying to achieve organizational change. The alteration of policy is one notable and effective way to ensure that topics brought up in trainings are then integrated into the organization. Changing hiring practices also increases the potential for a diverse staff, which was the most frequently listed attribute of diversity in question 3 (Table 1).

4.3 Successful Aspects

The most cited secondary code for successful aspects was an *internal or organizational focus* underlying the messages of DEI training. One organization chose to focus their equity

trainings on workshops that provided employees with the cultural context of their clients. This was the lens used to address broader DEI issues, while still keeping the focus of the training on specific, actionable factors related to the organization's goals. The success participants saw when DEI training was framed in the context of their organization's specific goals/mission helped employees contextualize DEI. One participant noted the importance of framing their work within "state relevant history. . . it's important to evaluate the physical geographical region we're in and how that connects to DEI." This highlights the variety of approaches organizations could take when integrating context into DEI training: some participants' organizations focused on the ethnic minorities they serve while others focused on the broader context of regional history and how it has influenced existing power structures. This research shows that, when an organization is designing DEI training, it is beneficial to consider what context is most appropriate in order to tie organizational goals with broader DEI messages.

Facilitated conversation between participants was another frequently cited secondary code for successful attributes of the DEI training. For example, one participant noted "what I loved was there was a lot of dialogue and talking opportunities [. . .] we would break into little breakout rooms and have dialogues about the exercise." The facilitation of conversation between participants allows for individual knowledge to be contextualized and workshopped with other staff members. The frequency with which participants mentioned the benefits of groupwork suggests that it can facilitate a deeper understanding of DEI and what DEI means to individual people.

Three participants noted the benefits they saw from reoccurring DEI trainings. In particular, one participant noted "diversity trainings are important if they are ongoing and at regular intervals, but if they are done sporadically, they tend to be more box checking exercises." This is representative of many participants' perspective on DEI trainings.

Another secondary code that led to success within nonprofits was *leadership buy in*. Participants mentioned the success their organizations saw when leadership set the tone for DEI goals and provided support for internal DEI work. One participant noted how empowering it was “having leadership set the tone that this [DEI] is something that is very important to the organization, that they are committed to [it].” This demonstrates that if leadership is setting an example and making an effort to communicate the importance of DEI, this energy is likely to permeate the organization. Participants who noted a disconnect between leadership and middle-level management reported feelings of frustration and fear. If leadership does not focus on DEI work, those working underneath them may feel unheard, unrepresented, or be afraid to speak up against leadership. Consequently, having leadership on board also mitigates fear that is often associated with advocating for DEI related change. Two participants who mentioned the importance of leadership buy-in also mentioned the significance of having the entire staff of an organization present for DEI trainings, so that the reasoning for implementation is understood. These findings suggest that DEI is more likely to be successful if staff understand how DEI work is related to leadership’s long-term goals.

4.4 Detrimental Aspects

Another theme that arose frequently throughout the interviews were *detrimental aspects*, which was coded 39 times. These codes fell into three broad themes: poor facilitation, follow through, and intention. Within these broad themes, sub-themes emerged as described in Table 6.

Table 6: Secondary themes of Detrimental Aspects

Secondary Code	Sub-themes	Frequency
Facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tokenization • Inexperienced facilitators • Damaging comments 	13

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power dynamics 	
Follow Through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actionable skills • Trainings building off previous work • One time training 	14
Intention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary • Funding • Intention/workplace culture around DEI • Half baked 	14

Comments related to the *facilitation* of diversity training were coded 13 times, with frustrations about the quality of discussions being most frequently mentioned. This section discusses the problems that arise when *damaging comments* are made and the intersection of *power dynamics* with training. Both of these themes are discussed through the lens of the importance of an experienced facilitator.

Participants who have experience discussing and engaging with DEI are often frustrated with the *damaging comments* made by people who have never engaged with the material. One participant noted that more evolved perspectives on DEI often clash with the more reactive comments made by staff members who have not discussed DEI before. Participants may feel reactive simply because of the sensitive nature of the conversation, or because they feel they are being reprimanded or punished for being privileged in ways that other staff members are not (Kulik et al., 2007). These findings suggest that damaging comments made by staff members, if not deescalated, can alter employees' relationships with one another in a harmful way. Several participants noted the disheartening experience of hearing a coworker express a harmful opinion and not having it addressed during the training. This suggests that having an experienced facilitator is very important. The benefits of an external facilitator are further discussed in section 1.6.

In addition to the mediation of conversation during DEI trainings, a facilitator or professional contractor will enter a DEI training with more knowledge and expertise. Participants noted that “there definitely is potential that people of color in our organization can be frustrated watching white people deal with their own issues. . . it can be emotionally draining and a waste of time.” This frequently described issue could be mitigated by a consultant coming in to mediate conversation: a consultant has additional expertise and experience in facilitating trainings and mediating conflict between participants. DEI trainings where a minority staff member is tasked with facilitating a conversation solely because of their identity is an example of *tokenization* or burdening of BIPOC individuals, particularly if white individuals do not recognize their individual responsibilities. The tokenization and offloading of DEI work onto employees with minority identities may also lead to poorly facilitated trainings: the employee is being tasked with emotional labor they may not even be specialized in, and they are only being asked to do it because of their identity. This situation may become increasingly difficult if power dynamics are at play, leading to an inability to say no. This research suggests that hiring someone with expertise in the area is critical in order to avoid the assignment of excess work on employees holding minority identities.

The participation of leadership in DEI training, discussed in section 1.4.4, is contingent on the mitigation of *power dynamics* interfering with participant’s behavior. One participant noted the challenges associated with realizing the people you work with are against DEI progress. Particularly for staff members holding marginalized identities, challenging the opinion of a boss may not feel safe or worth the associated risk. This research indicates that having an external facilitator and an agreement that all participants are on equal footing during the training may be beneficial.

One of the most frequently cited aspects of unsuccessful DEI training was *a lack of follow through* or expansion on a single diversity training, which was coded 14 times.

Participants frequently noted that DEI training that occurs only once is frustrating and has no lasting impression. Additionally, other participants noted the success they saw by implementing multi-session DEI trainings, suggesting that frequency and follow through are very important when implementing DEI training.

Another crucial aspect of DEI training that participants noted was missing was DEI training that did not start “at square one” every time. Participants expressed frustration that workshops did not *build on previous trainings*, commenting that “it often feels like we’re starting over every single time so that’s definitely a challenge/frustration.” This often occurred because of changes in staffing between trainings and long breaks between trainings, leading to participants forgetting previous topics. This research suggests that complications such as the one described above may be rectified by more frequent and recurring trainings, where content from the previous training is still remembered.

Participants had several suggestions for models for DEI trainings that built on previous workshops or trainings, including multi-day staff retreats, 3-5 trainings taught in consecutive order across a few months, and leveled DEI training that occurs based on previous experience. While there was not enough data to produce a suggestion in this research paper, further research is recommended.

In addition to *follow through* with subsequent trainings and material that builds on previous lessons, participants noted the importance of having *actionable skills* they could practice and implement in their day-to-day lives. For many participants, trainings that focus on the theoretical and the failures of current organizational structure leaves them feeling disheartened but unsure what to do to change their behavior. Participant suggestions included examples of ways to change hiring practices and language on websites/organizational materials.

Participants noted that voluntary diversity trainings were not as advantageous as *mandated trainings*, since those interested in DEI are also more likely to attend trainings. Furthermore, organizations that had self-directed DEI training material (such as employee organized book clubs) reported halfhearted engagement and little *tangible change* on the organizational level. In a criticism of current DEI training models, one participant noted that DEI trainings “are voluntary by nature, so people don’t have to adopt diverse viewpoints. . . and people who don’t want to or people who think they don’t have to [. . .] aren’t the type of people who voluntary engage with it.” This research indicates that DEI should be structured (rather than informal or self-directed) and be organization wide.

The intention an organization has when designing and implementing a DEI training is another important aspect. The most frequent complaint about DEI trainings was that they felt “half baked” or performative. This suggests that if DEI is built into the workplace culture, trainings will not be viewed as punishment or box-checking activities and more likely be accepted. One participant noted that lack of funding and organizational focus leads to amateurism when implementing DEI trainings, which can be more harmful than not having DEI training to begin with. In contrast, creating DEI training that focuses on organization specific goals, as discussed in section 1.4.1, will likely lead participants less frustrated with the generic or “half baked” training.

Funding is a crucial aspect of DEI trainings. One participant noted that funding for DEI training is often considered an internal benefit, rather than an externally focused tool. Because of this, nonprofits, which are already often dependent on grants, have a difficult time securing funding for these trainings.

4.5 Consultant

Consultant was coded 12 times. Participants' comments on the benefit of a consultant were generally related to either the *facilitation of respectful conversation* or the *specific expertise* a consultant brings to DEI trainings. As discussed in section 1.5.1, DEI trainings can result in harmful comments and the tokenization of minorities. Several participants noted the benefits their organization saw because of an external contractor. Three participants specifically described the benefits of a neutral third party coming in to mediate a difficult conversation and offer an outside perspective on DEI within the organization. More specifically, "there's outside bias: once you've brought someone in, they could tell you exactly what someone on your team has been telling you for months but because you paid them and brought them in as an expert you might hear them the way you haven't heard your colleague." This research indicates that hiring a consultant is likely to mitigate the issues described regarding facilitation: not only does a consultant have expertise and experience mediating these conversations, but it also removes the burden from staff members to implement DEI training when it is not their area of specialty. Participants also noted that hiring a consultant allowed the teams to better connect their training with their external organization goals. In addition to providing facilitation, these findings suggest that a consultant is also more likely to have knowledge about actionable steps an organization can take to improve DEI in the months following a workshop.

Discussion

5.1 Existing Literature and Implications for Nonprofits

This study explored what specific aspects of DEI training organizations can use to implement effective diversity training and supports many of the points made in the existing

literature. I will also highlight 2 effective action steps nonprofits can take when designing DEI training. This study found that *tangible change* and *increased awareness* are possible when DEI training is implemented correctly. This study also found that *reoccurring trainings* and the use of a *consultant* may lead to better outcomes for DEI training.

With respect to *increased awareness*, attitude changes may result from open conversation among employees and the sense of trust that is established when an organization prioritizes DEI. This is corroborated by existing research that suggests DEI training can be used as a collaborative learning tool (Paluck and Green, 2019). Notably, this research also suggest that DEI trainings are only effective when participants feel safe. This aligns with literature highlighting the importance of creating a safe space for diversity training to occur (Walker 2019).

More specifically, *tangible change* is likely to occur when trainings are contextualized to organizations and staff members: this in turn leads to DEI trainings feeling less like a personal attack or punishment. This is in agreement with research done by Kulik et al. (2007) and bolsters findings about the importance of context in DEI trainings. This research also suggests that facilitated discussion can lead to a deeper understanding of DEI and how to operationalize it within an organization (Paluck and Green, 2009; Anand & Winters, 2008), as well as the importance of follow-up after the completion of diversity training (Kulik et al., 2007). This research also found that having leadership on board with DEI programing, and more importantly, participating in it, reduces fear about challenging their boss or advocating for change. These findings relate to research discussing the important role leadership has in addressing an organization's DEI needs and creating a safe space for employees to address DEI (Walker, 2019).

While *tangible change* and *increased awareness* were themes most frequently mentioned, what participants found most helpful was hiring a *consultant* from outside the organization to conduct DEI training. These benefits include 1) mediation of difficult conversations, 2) reduced tokenization, 3) expertise and experience, and 4) provision of actionable skills. This research expands the existing findings about the benefits of a *consultant*. Research acknowledges that a consultant may have the skillset and experience to mediate conversation and help create a safe space (Walker, 2019). However, this research found that hiring a consultant also reduces the risk of damage an organization can do by removing the chance for leadership to offload DEI work onto inexperienced or overworked staff members. One of the frequently cited complaints about DEI programming from participants was being assigned DEI work because of a minority identity they hold. This research also found that providing participants with role-playing or conversation activities can improve the outcomes of DEI training. This corroborates existing literature and suggests that facilitated discussion can lead to a deeper understanding of DEI and how to operationalize it within an organization (Paluck and Green, 2009).

An organization's intention and commitment to DEI related change has a significant influence on the success of a training. In particular, this study shows that having *reoccurring DEI trainings* leads to better outcomes and less frustration among participants. One participant noted that sporadic DEI training was not necessarily harmful, but felt more like a box checking activity. Particularly for privileged individuals, DEI training that happens only once may feel meaningless. In contrast, for people who experience injustices every day based on their identities, these types of trainings are often cited as harmful and missing the goal of creating an inclusive environment (Walker 2019). These examples are common: there may not be harmful intent, but when DEI training is not facilitated by an expert or properly planned, harmful discussions and actions can occur. One implication that can be drawn from

this participant's experience, in conjunction with the findings of this study, is that DEI trainings need to be addressed with diligence and an understanding of the positive and negative effects DEI training can have on an organization. DEI trainings are also more likely to be successful when there is follow through on themes discussed during the training. Additionally, while current literature addresses the importance of providing organizational context for DEI trainings, it does not discuss the importance of ingraining DEI into an organization's climate. This suggests that DEI training is not the primary vehicle for DEI related change and is most effective when used to supplement other broader, work culture based initiatives.

The findings from this study have implications for future research and the design of DEI trainings and complements the existing literature by discussing in more detail what specific actions nonprofits can take (such as bringing in a consultant and following up on previous trainings) and what actions nonprofits should avoid (tasking inexperienced staff members to run trainings).

5.2 Limitations

Limitations to this research include potential sampling bias and a participant pool restricted to a narrow region. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling and reaching out to alumni or the University of Oregon School of Planning, Public Policy and Management (PPPM). Because the recruitment email contained the topic of DEI in the description, it is likely that many participants who signed up had a prior investment in DEI training. Additionally, graduates of the School of PPPM likely took coursework that stressed the importance of DEI and equity as a whole within the nonprofit sector. This is also likely to have contributed to sampling bias. The majority of participants in this study also work at organizations located in the Pacific Northwest. This is a result of the high percentage of

alumni of the University of Oregon and those participants' subsequent networks, which were used for snowball sampling. The results of this study may have been different if a wider demographic of participants were recruited from various states and regions across the United States.

5.3 Future Research

This research did not find conclusive findings about the debate of voluntary versus mandatory DEI trainings. While several participants noted that they felt DEI training should be mandatory, there was no evidence from participants' experiences that suggested DEI training was more or less effective when mandatory. The ongoing debate in current literature suggests that mandatory training is more likely to lead to damaging comments and frustration, however, there have been no studies looking at the methods employed during mandatory DEI trainings. This research suggests that the use of a consultant and organization specific trainings are likely to mitigate some of the problems described in existing literature on the topic of mandatory trainings. Additionally, policy changes related to DEI training are more likely to be well received if employees understand the logic and reasoning for that change (Dobbin and Kalev, 2016).

Conclusion

The increasing awareness about DEI means that many nonprofits are considering beginning or renewing DEI efforts. Designing and executing diversity training that does not leave participants frustrated or hurt is a daunting task, and most people have experienced or heard about a poorly executed DEI workshop. This research found that hiring an external consultant is the most effective strategy an organization can employ to avoid many of the frequently cited failures of DEI training. Additionally, DEI training cannot be a stand-alone

activity, and is more likely to succeed if related back to a broader organizational context.

While diversity training is not the primary vehicle for DEI change, it may be a critical tool in shifting workplace culture in a proactive and inclusive direction. As nonprofits across the nation renew and assess their commitment to DEI, it is critical that DEI trainings are well thought out and provided with the resources and funding necessary for success.

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