

# NOBODY'S PERFECT: Diversity Training Study Finds Common Flaws

By Aparna Nancherla

Organizational diversity and inclusion training programs are typically thought of as infallible building blocks toward progress. Their very purpose is to create a sense of tolerance and understanding in the workplace. So putting these processes in place should solve any and all discrimination-related issues, right? Not necessarily.

A recent Novations Group study of 2,556 senior human resources executives cited faulty delivery in the diversity and inclusion (D&I) training programs provided to their organizations. Almost one-third of D&I programs provided no tools to reinforce the training. About a quarter of D&I programs had no metrics offered to evaluate whether the programs were effective. Lacking any idea of the return-on-investment of D&I programs on a dollar-per-dollar basis is a hindrance. It prevents companies from knowing whether to change or improve their program planning.

General training program deficiencies were not the only flaws found. Some were more company-specific. Fifteen percent of survey respondents said their programs did not deal with the concerns of line managers. Many D&I programs are instituted in the C-suite, and little or no input from middle management is taken into consideration. Fred Smith, vice president of Novations, notes that within many existing programs, there is a lack of understanding as to what pressure points line managers have to deal with on a daily basis. Smith adds that companies often presume it is only the employees who must change.

"Nothing significant will be achieved if the organization itself doesn't look at its systems, biases, and ways of doing things," he says.

Two other findings revealed that 15 percent of respondents thought their programs had material that was too U.S.-focused, and 22 percent believed that no development or advancement issues were addressed. For many companies doing business outside the United States, their D&I training is not sufficient. Handling diversity issues varies across the globe, and employees are not being equipped with the proper skills.

Generational issues are another problem because many diversity policies are skewed toward baby boomers. However, it's a reality that many companies employ as many as four generations of workers. Not updating D&I programs to acknowledge the changing workforce is a major shortcoming. This bias increases turnover of younger workers who often have different priorities than their older colleagues.

"The findings should serve as a warning to both organizations and D&I program providers," Smith says. "It's the mistakes and shortcomings identified in the study that create 'diversity fatigue.' The best diversity training has moved far beyond the one-dimensional, feel-good event, and today, needs to be held to the same rigorous standards as other corporate training."

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## The BIG Number

# 22%

of diversity and inclusion training programs did not address development or advancement issues.

### >> Which of the following flaws has your organization encountered in regard to its diversity and inclusion training programs?

- No tools were provided to reinforce the training. . . . . 29%
- There were no metrics for evaluating effectiveness. . . . . 24%
- Diversity was addressed, but not development/advancement issues. . . . . 22%
- Clear objectives were not established. . . . . 15%
- Material was too U.S.-focused. . . . . 15%
- Concerns of line managers were not dealt with. . . . . 15%
- Content was trite. . . . . 14%
- Little thought leadership was shown. . . . . 9%
- Facilitation skills were poor. . . . . 8%
- Employer's policies and practices were not addressed. . . . . 7%

Source: Novations Group





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