Research Report  
Diversity training and research: Putting theory into practice  

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• **Background**  
Organisations are becoming increasingly diverse (e.g., Jackson & Joshi, 2001). Most work groups are comprised of people who differ in educational level, gender, racial/ethnic background, socioeconomic background, age, and other demographic characteristics. The need to value and manage diversity is thus important for any company wishing to create a harmonious workplace environment in which human resources (and company profits) are maximised (Collett & Cook, 2000; Jackson & Joshi, 2001). How, then, is diversity successfully managed within organisations?  

One method is to employ specialist diversity trainers to hold workshops to ‘train’ the workforce in diversity issues. Already commonplace in the US (Jackson & Joshi, 2001), it is being increasingly used in the UK. According to recent UK statistics, 69% of organisations have a diversity policy and 60% offer diversity training (Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, [CIPD] 2003).  

What is known, though, about the longer term effects of such training? At present, research into the effectiveness of diversity training (DT) is still in its infancy (Noe & Ford, 1992). DT sessions are often deemed “successful” even when assessment is missing entirely or limited to participants’ ratings of quality directly after attending (Driscoll, Kokini, Katehi, Wright, & Percifield, 2003). Many DT practitioners do not have expertise in assessment. As a result, most evaluative studies to date have been limited in scope.  

In the present research, we consider how DT practitioners might improve DT through a deeper appreciation of social psychological theory and research. We investigate whether, when and why approaches are likely to be effective. Such research should enable preliminary conclusions to be drawn about the current efficacy of DT tools at a general level, and increase the accountability of DT.  

• **Objectives**  
1. To select representative diversity exercises.  
2. To identify what social psychological theories/research findings are relevant.  
3. To demonstrate empirically whether, and why, exercises are effective.  
4. To develop/test new exercises derived from social psychological theory.  
5. To inform practitioners and academics about the potential applications of such work.  

We planned both empirical and activist type papers to meet the above objectives.  

Responding to previously noted problems encountered in conducting the empirical research, the decision was made to develop and research an additional objective. It became apparent whilst conducting this research that the topic of managing diversity
in organisations is one that causes a great deal of stress and ill-feeling among employees. During the grant period, Dr Pendry was approached to conduct research within her university on staff attitudes towards diversity. We conducted this research, adding in certain elements to inform our grant research. Specifically, we sought to better understand how attitudes towards DT initiatives are expressed depending upon the social climate in which responses are audited and to better understand the role that employee stress plays in perceptions of diversity initiatives. This attitude assessment constitutes a sixth objective.

Procedures

- Ethical approval
  The School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (University of Exeter) provided ethical clearance for the UK research. For the US data, it was necessary to obtain Human Subjects Ethical Approval at the University of Purdue.

- Methods
  Methods differed dependent upon the nature of the research, and are dealt with separately. Each initiative is preceded by more specific background information:

  Intergroup Attribution Exercise
  Past research has highlighted that we explain ambiguous behaviours differently depending upon whether they are performed by ingroup versus outgroup members (e.g., Duncan, 1976). One finding is that participants consistently favour the ingroup, either using more positive language to describe ambiguous behaviour, or explaining unambiguously negative behaviour in situational terms (see Hewstone, 1988).

  Looking at other literatures (social inference, clinical, stereotype activation), it has been shown that awareness of certain cognitive biases, in conjunction with appropriate retraining, can lead to their modification (e.g., Fong, Krantz, & Nisbett, 1986; Forsterling, 1985; Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermse, & Russin, 2000; Kawakami, Dovidio, & van Kamp, 2005). Therefore, across a range of disciplines, there is preliminary evidence that certain cognitive biases can be diminished, provided participants are motivated to change and willing to undergo the required intervention procedure. It is possible, then, that awareness of attributional biases, and the resultant guilt, might lead to a more deliberative style of decision making which attenuates bias, or to an intention to regulate future output so that it appears less biased (e.g., Monteith, 1993).

  We adapted the intergroup bias paradigm for use in the present research since it is a useful means of demonstrating a subtle but potentially harmful intergroup bias that can occur within organisations. We aimed to assess whether awareness of such bias led to attenuated bias in the longer term.

Participants

Following suggestions made by the University’s Business Projects Officer, together with organisations with whom the researchers had had prior contact, letters and brief synopses of the research project were sent to a total of fifty-five South-West businesses during the period October 2003 to May 2004. As a result of this contact, eleven organisations expressed interest. Of these, six requested further information and face-to-face meetings were held with a further four. Unfortunately, several
organisations were unable to proceed from this point for differing reasons; for example, two organisations were undergoing internal diversity audits and felt unable to participate. As of July 2004, we had confirmed two organisations for participation, providing a total of 27 participants.

**Procedure**

Having discussed with both organisations their requirements and expectations of training, we selected the Intergroup Attribution Exercise (IAE). This exercise was considered most relevant to the organisations’ training needs since it could be adapted to focus upon recurrent problems related to discriminatory language use more generally. It was agreed that Dr Pendry and Susannah Field (research assistant) would visit these organisations and deliver DT (IAE training/discussion versus a more general control), along with measures to assess pre- and post-training attitudes towards diversity and prejudice. Follow-up measures were to be administered six and twelve months after training.

Although we honoured our commitment to these organisations and conducted the trainings, it quickly became apparent that the data collected were inadequate for statistical purposes. Of the twenty seven participants who originally took part, only eleven completed the follow-up at six months (nine from the experimental group, two from the control), and only two at twelve months (both from the experimental group). The primary goal of this study was to assess whether participants’ tendency to demonstrate the Intergroup Attribution Bias would diminish over time following exposure to information and in-depth discussion about the IAE (versus a control). In light of the poor response rate, it was unfortunately not possible to compute meaningful statistical analyses, to assess changes between conditions.

Clearly, the outcome of this study was disappointing, but it highlighted a genuine, unforeseen problem that was likely to hinder future similar data collection initiatives: in spite of our best efforts, we could not locate organisations/participants in the South West in sufficient numbers to properly test our original hypotheses. Since we had planned similar methodologies for the remaining studies, it became a priority to rethink how best to proceed. We decided to focus our efforts for the remainder of the project on finding alternative methods that would enable more data to be collected quickly, whilst still addressing the original research aims (together with an additional aim).

**Implicit Association Test**

The IAT is widely used as an implicit measure in research and is increasingly used in DT sessions as a tool for teaching about implicit bias (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998). The task assesses the strength of association for a series of word-picture pairings (e.g., White/Black faces paired with positive/negative words). It is based on the idea that the more closely associated two concepts are, the easier it is to respond to them when paired on the same response side (i.e., when responding to them requires hitting the same computer key). Responses are translated into an IAT result that suggests strength of association (e.g., I moderately prefer White Americans to African Americans) and this is fed back. The tacit assumption is that acquiring knowledge of such bias can facilitate prejudice reduction. Little is known, however, about the reactions of IAT takers to the test or their test results. The present research considered the potential and pitfalls of using the IAT in DT.
Participants
In order to generate a larger sample, we decided to use US participants (data being collected by the co-researcher on this grant, Professor Driscoll). Participants across a wide range of disciplines were used in this study: faculty staff (n = 15), teaching assistants (n = 12) and psychology undergraduates (n = 96).

Procedure
All participants attended DT sessions organised by Professor Driscoll. Prior to a DT/classroom lecture on prejudice, participants were sent information encouraging them to log onto an IAT Web address and take an IAT. They then turned up at the DT session where their results and reactions were discussed in detail. Dependent upon the sample, a range of cognitive, affective and behavioural reactions were assessed.

University Staff
Staff completed the Race IAT and were asked to report on 1) What they were thinking as they were completing the IAT, 2) What they were feeling as they were completing the IAT, as well as 3) Any additional comments.

Teaching Assistants in Maths, Science, and Engineering.
Prior to a DT workshop, graduate students in maths, engineering, and science were encouraged to complete the Gender IAT (looking at the extent to which women were associated with liberal arts and men with math/sciences) and to complete an accompanying one-page survey. The survey asked for their predicted/actual IAT results, their reactions to the IAT result they received after completing the Gender IAT, adjective checklist ratings (assessing feelings), and for additional comments. Twelve graduate students (predominantly male and international) handed in their surveys. Although a small N, the demographics reflect fairly well the demographics of Teaching Assistants in many maths, sciences, and engineering departments in the States.

Undergraduate Psychology Majors
Several psychologists have used the IAT in class to introduce the concept of an implicit attitude. We decided to survey an upper level psychology class because the students would already be somewhat educated about the methodology critical for understanding the IAT, as well as having some exposure to the pertinent literature. Perhaps without having to expend cognitive energy understanding new methodology and theory, an IAT taker might be more accepting of test results.

Participants were given instructions to go the IAT Web address. We asked students to report the following: Which IAT test they selected (from 11 tests), strength/direction of predicted/actual IAT results, and their reaction to the feedback they received. Then students were asked to rate a series of adjectives on a 1 (not at all) to 5 (very) scale as to how taking the test made them feel.

Literature Review: Diversity training: Putting theory into practice
When it comes to strategies for tackling diversity issues, there is something of a divide between theory and practice. On the one hand, a variety of theoretical approaches have been utilized to better understand group phenomena, and in particular, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Classic social psychological
approaches look at the problem of bias reduction from a generally rigorous, theory-driven perspective (e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner, Stewart, Esses, ten Vergert, & Hodson, 2004). On the other, there is a growing literature on cultural diversity that emphasises how to train people to more effectively manage diversity in the corporate world and in education (Brewer, Hippel & Gooden, 1999). The impetus for and stated research goals of social psychologists interested in intergroup conflict and prejudice, and those of diversity trainers, are often similar. Both, for example, have an underlying goal of improved intergroup relations. In spite of these similarities, they currently operate in a separate fashion with limited dialogue.

We considered the main theoretical issues that can inform practitioners about practical approaches to use in DT with reference to both classic methods and newer initiatives. Recognising the huge variation in DT programmes, our strategy was to highlight and discuss several generic approaches that underpin many of the different exercises and programmes commonly used. We wrote this article with the aim of galvanizing the respective fields into collective action, by demonstrating how and why partnership between the two disciplines may prove beneficial.

Attitudes towards diversity
Auditing organisational support for diversity is an increasingly common attempt to gauge the effectiveness of diversity initiatives. For example, the UK Audit Commission recommends that all organisations conduct internal staff surveys on issues related to diversity. With regards to both diversity policies and DT, it is unclear whether they have had positive effects on employee support for diversity. Measures of diversity attitudes are mixed, often differing between groups (Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkma., 1998; Richard, Fubara, & Castillo, 2000) and non-attitude measures suggest that discrimination is still at work within supposedly “diversity-active” organisations (Naff & Kellough, 2003).

While the variety of methods involved in these attitude studies makes comparison difficult, one shared similarity is that they operationalize diversity attitudes as an individual difference measure. By extension, they assume an individual’s attitudes towards diversity reflect relatively stable cognitions, and thus are relatively independent of social context. However, evidence suggests that an individual’s reported attitudes may be profoundly affected by their perceptions of current social context (Ellemers, Van Dyck, Hinkle & Jacobs, 2000; Postmes, Branscombe, Spears & Young, 1999; Spears & Smith, 2001). Hence, expressed attitudes, rather than being the result of stable individual differences, may be strategic, fluid responses to local, social context that are affected by political, self-presentational motives (Spears & Smith, 2001).

In this study, we considered how attitudes towards diversity policies/training within organisations may be similarly prey to such variation, as a function of participants’ identification with the organisation and the perceived source of the audit. It was predicted that perceived audience would interact with employees’ levels of organisational identification to predict their reports of support for diversity. Employees who identify weakly with the organisation would report different attitudes towards diversity, depending on the apparent audience. When a diversity survey appeared to come from an external regulatory body (an outgroup audience), they were likely to report greater support for diversity than when the survey originated from
their own organisation (ingroup audience). In contrast, employees who identify highly with the organisation would maintain their levels of support for diversity, irrespective of their apparent audience. The second research aim was to investigate the part played by stress in perceptions of diversity and organisational identification. Specifically, we assessed whether diversity-related stress was associated with organisational identification in the same way as more general organisational stress.

Participants and design
A total of 2074 university staff were invited to complete the survey. Due to the time of the year there were widespread vacation absences. As a result, copies were made available for staff to complete on their return. 297 questionnaires were returned (a response rate of 14.3%). Two spoiled papers were removed, leaving a final sample of 295.

Members of the Personnel department worked with the researchers to develop a questionnaire which, in addition to the key research measures, would build on previous internal surveys. The two key independent variables were apparent survey audience and organisational identification, with pro-diversity attitudes and diversity-related stress as dependent variables. Apparent survey audience (i.e., Organisation or External audit) was manipulated by way of the information sheet attached to the questionnaire. The three central dependent variables were pro-diversity attitudes, diversity-related stress and organisational identification.

Procedure
Questionnaires were distributed using the organisation’s internal mail system (to be returned to the Personnel department).

Results
Implicit Association Test
Driscoll, Pendry, & Field, under review (addressing Objectives 4 and 5)

Results were analysed using both quantitative (Analysis of Variance and factor analysis) and qualitative (content analysis) methods. The assumption, as noted, is that the discomfort that arises from learning of unintentional bias in the IAT will impact in a positive way on future behaviour towards target group members (e.g., Monteith, et al., 2001). Results from the present research indicated a far more varied pattern of responding. We highlighted a number of issues and misconceptions about the IAT and what participants think it demonstrates that suggests it be used with care in DT:

1. The methodology and theory behind the IAT is complex: A full appreciation of how it works and what results mean requires an understanding of method and theory. This was not always readily achieved by lay people (or even undergraduate psychology students). First, the crucial distinction between implicit bias and being prejudiced is difficult to convey. Some IAT takers drew erroneous conclusions based upon their own lay theories of prejudice. Second, IAT takers sometimes misattributed bias to implausible methodological issues, whereas others did not understand how their responses actually indicated bias. Monteith et al. (2001) also reported such misattribution, and recommend using it as a startpoint from which to confront supposedly non-prejudiced students. In practical terms, this may be difficult to
achieve in a training setting. Although such an approach may work with a one-on-one interaction with a diversity trainer, based on our combined experiences running numerous class demonstrations and DTs, we do not find this confrontational response works well. These more common types of misunderstandings about the IAT need to be addressed by trainers if it is to have positive effects in DT.

2. **IAT Takers’ reactions are varied and engender a range of affective consequences:** Social psychologists have frequently argued that awareness of bias and the resultant compunction that may arise is an important first step in diminishing prejudice (Monteith et al., 2001). In past work on the IAT, Monteith et al. (2001) observed that the majority of strongly biased participants detected that they were responding in a biased manner, and experienced guilt. Those with a lesser bias tended to detect their biased responding less well, and felt less guilty.

Whilst this may be the end result, it is not inevitable. Our data also considered how individual differences in bias level impact upon negative affective responses. Our findings suggested a more varied pattern of cognitive and affective reactions (e.g., confusion, sadness, disappointment, anger, contempt, damaged self-concept) that need to be carefully handled. It may be premature to conclude that any negative affective response will instigate the same self-regulatory cycle. Practitioners must be aware of the complexity of such negative affective responding, and deal sensitively with concerned trainees.

**Literature Review: Diversity training: Putting theory into practice**

Pendry, Driscoll, & Field 2007 (assessing Objectives 1, 2 3, 4 and 5)

We demonstrated that psychological theory rarely guides the development of most DT programmes. In this article, we focused upon the role that social psychology can play in the design of DT programmes, and provided several clear suggestions for practitioners. We focused first upon classic approaches in DT (informative approach/enlightenment, dissonance or guilt-inducing approaches and social identity approaches). Our findings are briefly summarised below.

**Informative approaches:** These programmes aim to inform participants, raising awareness of the continuing existence of societal or workplace bias and emphasising particular groups’ historic misdemeanours in this respect. Although such approaches are clearly appealing, research from several literatures (including attitude change and social identity) suggest such material requires careful consideration, strategising, and finesse to deliver without triggering defensiveness and reactance (e.g., Doosje, Spears & Ellemers, 2002; Shavitt, 1990). Methods that evoke perspective taking or emotional empathy (e.g., Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000) and factual presentations about legal issues may be of some merit. To achieve DT goals, we concluded that the effectiveness of informative approaches in isolation seems quite limited.

**Dissonance-inducing approaches:** These methods elicit trainees’ emotional reactions by using confrontational/interactive methods, increasing the likelihood that an individual will feel dissonance and take responsibility for inequity. We focused upon an analysis of two exercises: Walking Through White Privilege (McIntosh, 1988) and
Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes (Stewart, LaDuke, Bracht, Sweet, & Gamarel, 2003). Both use methods designed to highlight real or artificial divisions between groups as a means of demonstrating how intergroup differences and hostilities can develop. Drawing upon related social psychological research, and our own UK and US pilot data, we discussed a number of concerns with such methods in DT. We concluded that such ‘high risk’ initiatives that highlight intergroup differences can backfire by reducing positive intergroup feelings and behaviour (Hewstone, 1996). We suggested that diversity trainers and social psychologists need to more closely explore the impact of a range of negative emotions (guilt, anger, distress) as mediators of results obtained. Further we cautioned that trainers considering this type of exercise should consider how such principles might impact upon the design, delivery and aftermath of the exercise, and provide follow-up opportunities for participants to deal with anger responses in a constructive fashion.

Social identity approaches: Who am I? In this exercise people list the social groups they belong to, select those they feel are most important, rank them in terms of relative importance to self and then discuss. It shows people that they differ not only in terms of which groups they belong to, but also in terms of which they consider important. Trainees from groups that appear to differ along core group dimensions (e.g., race, gender) may still show strong consensus in terms of the importance they assign to other group memberships (e.g., work-place groups). Hence this method increases the salience of co-workers’ common social identity. In social psychological terms, this process allows for recategorization (i.e., being able to think of someone as an ingroup member when categorized one way, but an outgroup member when categorized in another way; e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner, & Bachman, 2001). Recategorization is important because failing to construe the wider organisation as an ingroup to which both of the former groups belong leads to less interdependent and cooperative behaviour. In contrast, diversity initiatives which increase the salience of co-workers’ common social identity – while allowing employees still to benefit from other, previously important group memberships – may in turn improve cooperative behaviour among employees. We concluded that these exercises work well in training sessions (based on our UK and US pilot data) and the sound theoretical basis that underpins them leads us to be more confident that they may prove a beneficial tool in DT.

Newer initiatives: Here, we summarise our preliminary findings that pertain to the development and utility of DT initiatives that derive from mainstream social psychology.

(i) Implicit Association Test (previously covered above)

(ii) Father-Son exercise: Participants are asked to solve a problem involving a father (who dies in an accident), his son (taken to hospital following the same accident), and the surgeon who subsequently operates on the son. The surgeon declares it is not possible to operate as the patient is the surgeon’s son, and participants are asked to explain how this is possible. Based on US data from hundreds of participants collected over several years in various DT sessions, we found that in about 40% of cases, people do not think of the most plausible solution (the surgeon is the boy’s mother). Instead, they generate a range of convoluted explanations (e.g., the “father” in the accident must have been a Catholic priest).
Essentially, participants find it hard to overcome the automatically activated stereotype (i.e., surgeons are generally men). In the ensuing discussion, we use our knowledge of the social psychology literature to explain the cognitive underpinnings of this failure to spot the “obvious” solution (e.g., Bargh, 1999). We broaden out the discussion also to include newer research highlighting why such failures are not inevitable (e.g., Moskowitz, Gollwitzer, Wasel, & Schaal, 1999). In training sessions, we have found this exercise very powerful. It is simple to administer and understand, but does not humiliate or upset participants. The exercise has the power to stun individuals who do not consider themselves susceptible to stereotyping. By reference to the relevant literature, trainers are able to reinforce points made by the exercise and promote a deeper understanding of the processes involved. We recommend that the social-cognitive approach this type of exercise exemplifies be developed and used further in DT since it simply and powerfully illustrates how even those with supposed “exempt status” can be prey to the insidious nature of stereotypes

(iii) Intergroup Attribution Exercise (previously covered above)

Conclusions: Throughout the article, we remained sensitive to the problems that arise when relating theory to practice. We concluded that DT offers a splendid forum in which to act out and evaluate many of the premises that underpin social psychological approaches to prejudice reduction. We suggested that trainers think more systematically about how they could adapt ideas from mainstream social psychology. Equally, we noted that social psychologists could pay more attention to how their theories and laboratory research play out in real world training sessions. We anticipate that the present article will help encourage crosstalk between the respective fields, in order to generate creative efforts to improve the ways in which DT programmes are developed (and assessed) in the future.

Attitudes towards diversity
Pendry, Haslam, & Field, in preparation (assessing Objective 6)

Results were analysed using hierarchical regression. As predicted, we found that those who identified weakly with the organisation adapted responses to the audience and were significantly more positive towards diversity when the perceived audience was the external regulatory body. This suggests that low-identifiers have strategically adapted their reports of support for diversity. When the survey appeared to originate from an external evaluator, this made a political norm salient (i.e., the evaluator approves of diversity). However, when the survey appears to be an organisational, or in-group initiative, it is possible to ignore the threat of sanction by the outgroup (Spears & Smith, 2001). As such, low-identifiers feel able to report more neutral attitudes towards diversity initiatives within the organisation. Employees who identified highly with the organisation maintained their level of support for diversity, irrespective of audience. Diversity-related stress was found to correlate strongly and negatively with organisational identification, suggesting that if organisations wish to enhance employees’ diversity coping strategies, it may be desirable to encourage the formation and maintenance of social identities within the workforce (Haslam, Eggins, & Reynolds, 2003).

These findings demonstrate that support for diversity initiatives appears to increase quickly in response to a simple intervention: that of merely changing the apparent
social context. This suggests an element of caution in taking reported diversity attitudes at face value, without also taking into account local norms. Perhaps the most constructive aspect to these findings is as follows: if organisations want to increase their workforce’s support for diversity, organisational norms and the salience of an organisational identity may be useful tools with which to realise this goal.

**Overall conclusions**

The present research has contributed to our understanding of the part social psychology can play in developing and improving DT initiatives, and has succeeded in its aim of informing two quite different audiences. Our work highlights the need to pay careful attention to the social psychological underpinnings of both existing and new approaches in DT. Finally, we have demonstrated that care should be taken when assessing attitudes towards diversity issues. Responses may be more malleable than previously thought, being shaped by factors such as the interaction between organisational identity and local political norms.

**Activities**

*Conference presentations*


Following a period of maternity leave, it is anticipated that this research will further be disseminated by Dr Pendry at the next BPS Occupational Section meeting.

*Public broadcasting*

Dr Pendry was invited to contribute to a BBC Radio 4 programme entitled *The Business of Race* (broadcast December 05) focusing upon issues surrounding DT in industry.

*Diversity training*

The research assistant (Susannah Field) visited Professor Driscoll to receive instruction in DT methods (Winter, 03).

*Teaching about diversity issues in organisations*

Dr Pendry was invited to teach on these issues to a range of Armed Forces professionals (University’s Continuing Professional Development initiative) (September 04).

**Outputs**

The results of this research are written up in three manuscripts, one of which is in press (to be published Spring 2007), one under review, and the third in preparation.


*dataset offered for deposit at Data Archive*

- **Impacts**

As noted, implications of this research have been aired on national radio and presented at a UK management consultants’ conference. This exposure generated significant nationwide interest from practitioners and Dr Pendry has since been approached by several individuals about advising on the development of future DT initiatives.

- **Future Research Priorities**

The theoretical implications and applications of the conducted research are still at the core of our current research activities.

A further paper (co-authored with Professor Denise Driscoll) is planned concentrating upon the role of social psychology in the evaluation of DT initiatives (target outlet: JOOP).

A paper on the part social cognitive methods can play in DT initiatives is planned (Driscoll, Pendry, Kelly, & Chapple; target outlet: Journal of Applied Social Psychology).

Dr Pendry is discussing with several DT practitioners a possible collaboration to assist design/evaluation of future DT initiatives.

In light of the practical issues associated with data collection on this project, we are considering modifying the ‘single exercise’ approach we had originally envisaged to more of a ‘program’ approach for future DT work.
References


