

Why Diversity Programs Fail

What went wrong?

- The positive effects of diversity training rarely last beyond a day or two, and a number of studies suggest that it can activate bias or spark a backlash.
- One reason is that three-quarters use negative messages in their training.
- You won't get managers on board by blaming and shaming them with rules and reeducation.
- Force-feeding can activate bias rather than stamp it out. As social scientists have found, people often rebel against rules to assert their autonomy.
- People often respond to compulsory courses with anger and resistance—and many participants actually report more animosity toward other groups afterward.
- Don't use training as punishment (or force training every time a problem comes up).
- Things don't get better when firms put in formal grievance systems; they get worse. Managerial ranks of white women and all minority groups except Hispanic men decline—by 3% to 11%—in the five years after companies adopt them.
- What about performance systems? Managers work around them. Ratings don't boost diversity. When companies introduce them, there's no effect on minority managers over the next five years, and the share of white women in management drops by 4%, on average.

Poor Returns on the Usual Diversity Programs

The three most popular interventions make firms less diverse, not more, because managers resist strong-arming. For instance, testing job applicants hurts women and minorities—but not because they perform poorly. Hiring managers don't always test everyone (white males often get a pass) and don't interpret results consistently

Type of program	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Mandatory diversity training				-9.2			-4.5	-5.4
Job tests		-3.8	-10.2	-9.1	-6.7	-8.8		-9.3
Grievance systems		-2.7	-7.3	-4.8		-4.7	-11.3	-4.1

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What worked?

- When managers feel the choice is theirs, bias decreases.
- Companies get better results when they ease up on the control tactics.
- Interventions such as targeted college recruitment, mentoring programs, self-managed teams, and task forces have boosted diversity in businesses.
- While white male executives don't feel comfortable reaching out informally to young women and minority men, they are eager to mentor assigned protégés.
- When managers actively help boost diversity in their companies, they begin to think of themselves as diversity champions.
- Voluntary training evokes positive response, leading to better results.
- Focus on minority recruitment.
- It helps to make managers feel accountable without subjecting them to public rebuke.
- It's more effective to engage managers in solving the problem, increase their on-the-job contact with female and minority workers, and promote social accountability—the desire to look fair-minded.
- Working side-by-side breaks down stereotypes, which leads to more equitable hiring and promotion.

Diversity Programs That Get Results

Companies do a better job at increasing diversity when they forgo the control tactics and frame their efforts more positively. The most effective programs spark engagement, increase contact among different groups, or draw on people's strong desire to look good to others.

% CHANGE OVER FIVE YEARS IN REPRESENTATION AMONG MANAGERS								
Type of program	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Voluntary training			+13.3		+9.1		+9.3	+12.6
Self-managed teams	-2.8	+5.6	+3.4	+3.9				+3.6
Cross-training	-1.4	+3.0	+2.7	+3.0	-3.9		+6.5	+4.1
College recruitment: women*	-2.0	+10.2	+7.9	+8.7		+10.0	+18.3	+8.6
College recruitment: minorities**			+7.7	+8.9				
Mentoring				+18.0	+9.1	+23.7	+18.0	+24.0
Diversity task forces	-3.3	+11.6	+8.7	+22.7	+12.0	+16.2	+30.2	+24.2
Diversity managers		+7.5	+17.0	+11.1		+18.2	+10.9	+13.6

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