

Impact of Cultural Competency Training on Inclusion in Diverse Workplaces Abstract

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the impact of systematic, evidence based cultural competency training on fostering inclusion in multicultural workplaces. It looks into theory, training models and their methodological rigor, findings, implications for future practice, utilizing peer reviewed literature, organizational documents, and primary data. The research reveals benefits like reduced bias, improved communication, enhanced retention alongside challenges like backfire effects and tokenism. Suggested are multidisciplinary approaches, active engagement from leaders, and sustained assessment.

Keywords: Cultural Competency Training; Workplace Inclusion; Diversity And Equity; Intercultural Communication; Implicit Bias and Organizational Culture

1. Introduction

Workplaces have become more culturally diverse due to global migration, technological interconnectivity, as well as corporate expansion. The potential benefits of diversity are greater innovation, customer insight, and a competitive advantage. However, inclusion-ensuring that every employee feels respected, valued, and able to contribute-is critical to harnessing diversity's potential. CCT aims to achieve inclusion by addressing issues of bias and cultural inequities, thus enhancing inclusion. Still, the effectiveness of such training has been contested. Meta-analyses show mixed outcomes--some affirm that voluntary, skill-based interventions reduce bias, while others caution that mandatory, short-term programs may even backfire. The current paper aims to fill that gap by reviewing studies from 2020 to 2025, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze CCT's impact on inclusion and derive evidence-based best practices.

2. Literature Review

Cultural competency has been defined as the awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills pertaining to one's culture and that of other people (Sue et al, 2009; Culture Monkey, 2024). Its elements include but are not limited to:

- + Cultural awareness: Acceptance and recognition of personal biases and worldviews (CultureMonkey, 2024).
- + Attitudes: Recognition and acceptance of differences in cultures (CultureMonkey, 2024).
- + Knowledge: Awareness of cultural practices and their corresponding dynamics of relations (Sue et al. 2009).
- + Skills: Listening, relevant communication, and conflict resolution (Sue et al, 2009; USC's Applied Psychology, 2023).

2.1. Efficacy of CCT

Bezrukova et al. (2016) noted the effectiveness of training when it is embedded in broader DEI strategies. Also, when it seeks, real behavior changes as opposed to awareness only. Lindsey, King, Hebl & Levine (2015) stress the role of

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method, motivation, and empathy in outcomes. Still, while many cite peculiarity, mandatory compliance has counter results; stagnation or resistance in diversity metrics (Dobbin & Kalev, 2006; Diversity training, 2025).

2.2. Business Benefits

Case studies from Canada (Chan, 2023) Telecommunication company TELUS is a good example of how CCT (Cultural Competency Training) aids in closing, "unrecognized gaps" in Indigenous operations enhancing both workplace inclusivity as well as customer outcomes. Market insights and culturally appropriate models of service begin at training (UnexpectedVirtua!Tours 2024).

2.3. Psychological Safety & Retention

Recruitment and turnover in USC's Applied Psychology team 2023 shows that inclusively competent cultures create psychological safety, which enhances both recruitment and retention of employees Q. The public sector studies found that strung inclusive cultures under transformational leadership mediate commitment and have a positive correlation with retention (Ashikali & Groeneveld 2015; Trochmann et al. 2023).

2.4. Innovative Training Methods

"Hats off" to the NHS for creating new ways to teach empathy. Programs like "Walking in the Shoes" VR empathizes with discrimination, fostering improved bystander responses (Hatch & Rhead 2024). Such methods to augment traditional training are on the rise.

2.5. Caveats & Critiques

The MCB Review 2022 focuses on gaps in the systemic impact of program design, stating the evidence base is amorphous. Badeloch, 2023 conducted a UK government-sponsored critique highlighting a lack of reliable evidence, calling some DEI training 'snake oil' and calling for a stronger reliance on evidence-based solutions (Badenoch 2023)

3. Methodology

This paper uses a systematic literature review methodology as an approach to gather empirical research articles and organization documents from 2020-2025. Specific primary sources were located through PubMed, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and organizational white papers under the search terms "cultural competency training workplace inclusion," "virtual reality diversity training," and "cultural awareness interventions." Studies were selected based on strict criteria:

Quantitative designs with control/comparison groups (NHS VR pilot, inunersive measures). Systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Lindsey et al., 2015; Bezrukova et al, 2016), Longitudinal evaluations (Ashikali & Groeneveld 2015; Trochmann et al, 2023). And Thematic critiques on unintended consequences (Badenoch 2023; Diversity Training, 2025). Emphasis was placed on outcome variables such as bias reduction alongside measures of inclusion (belonging, retention), change in behavior, and policy change. Due to the diversity of the studies included, findings are organized thematically.

4. Findings

The literature reviewed suggests the particular importance of strategy and thorough evaluation given the positive outcomes CCT has on inclusion outcomes. The main takeaways are:

4.1. Positive Impact on Interpersonal Inclusion and Communication

There are improvements in interpersonal relations along racial, ethnic, and gender lines. Culturally attuned teams are more empathetic and agile in their communication, which facilitates conflict resolution. As noted by Chan (2023), team collaboration, especially in sections interfacing with Indigenous communities, bolstered after structured cultural awareness trainings at TELUS.

CCT allows individuals to develop micro-intervention strategies which means they can effectively respond to mild aggressive behaviors. The more recent application of these principles in corporate settings has shown measurable changes in inclusiveness perceptions (Kulik & Roberson, 2021), particularly from minority employees.

4.2. Bias Reduction and Mitigation of Stereotypes

Large-scale field experiments conducted by Lai et al. (2016) revealed the possibility of mitigating bias with specific targeted and counter-stereotype exposure interventions. Although the effect fades with time, consistent refreshers help maintain improvements. The NHS pilot program utilizing VR immersion where participants 'experience' racism has increased empathy and awareness, particularly among frontline managers (Hatch & Rhead, 2024).

Dobbin and Kalev (2022) warn, however, that mandatory diversity training tends to invoke resistance. In their longitudinal study of over 800 companies in the U.S., the authors found that bias-reduction training works best when it is offered voluntarily, and when it is part of a larger organizational culture transformation.

4.3. Increased employee engagement and retention

In a recent study, Ashikali and Groeneveld (2015) show that leadership based on CCT (Complexity Leadership Theory) enhances organizational commitment and employee satisfaction. Also, Trochmann et al. in a report commissioned by the UK government in 2023 noted that departments which regularly practiced CCT behaved inclusively and as a result experienced lower turnover and higher uptake of inclusive practices.

According to Catalyst (2021), employees working for managers who possess cultural competence report greater psychological safety which predicts retention, innovation, and performance within teams.

4.4. Variable Effectiveness Based on Delivery Format

The way something is delivered can determine its effectiveness. Bezrukova et al. (2016) noted in their meta-analysis that programs including role-playing, simulations, and storytelling resulted in greater behavioral changes compared to lecture-based programs. As reported by Hatch & Rhead (2024), the NHS VR initiative outperformed static training, indicating that experiential learning may be promising for other future programs.

As outlined by Dobbin & Kalev (2016), poorly designed, singular compliance framing sessions, tend to show no effect--or even a detrimental effect--on training outcomes. This emphasizes the value of positioning CCT as part of a broader shift in organizational culture and structure comprehensive transformation.

5. Conclusion

Cultural competency training has a positive effect on inclusion in diverse workplaces. It raises awareness, reduces biases, improves communication, supports psychological safety---critical elements of inclusivity. However, the training's effectiveness cannot be taken for granted. Thoughtful design, integration with broader organizational frameworks, ongoing commitment, and engaged leadership are essential.

The review shows the most effective CCT programs:

- Center on voluntary participation and skill acquisition Use interactive or immersive techniques (role-play, VR)
- Are integrated within broader DEI or inclusive leadership frameworks Include evaluation and reinforcement activities post-training

Cultural competency should not be treated as a checklist, but instead viewed as an evolving, journey straddling deep structural transformation, self-assessment, and a genuine commitment to fairness and equality.

Recommendations

Drawing from the review, the following recommendations are outlined:

- Integrate CCT into Broader DEI Frameworks

Align training with inclusive leadership, policy changes, and system-wide performance indicators to drive meaningful change (Catalyst, 2021; Dobbin & Kalev, 2022).

- Shift to Experiential Learning

Use simulations, VR, case studies, and storytelling to engage participants on emotional and cognitive levels (Hatch & Rhead, 2024; Bezrukova et al., 2016).

- Emphasize Cultivating Lifelong Learning

Replace one-off workshops with sustained engagement, including follow-up sessions, feedback mechanisms, and ongoing refresher training (Lai et al., 2016; Lindsey et al., 2015).

- Avoid Mandates That Trigger Resistance

Coercive approaches often lead to resistance or at best surface-level compliance. Encouraging participation through incentives and good leadership practices will be much more effective (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016).

- Evaluate Outcomes and Impact

Assess the long-term impact of training on inclusion, bias, and equity with surveys, interviews, and workplace behavioral assessments (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Trochmann et al., 2023).

- Train Leaders First

Focus on training leaders as they shape organizational culture and can champion inclusivity (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015).

With these recommendations, organizations are more likely to see cultural competency training translate into measurable outcomes of genuine and profound inclusion.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

If two or more authors have contributed in the manuscript, the conflict-of-interest statement must be inserted here.

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