

# New research helps organizations deliver stronger diversity training

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Credit: University at Buffalo

While diversity training programs are a good way to build awareness of cultural differences, they usually are not as effective at changing attitudes and behaviors toward diverse groups in the workplace, according to new research from the University at Buffalo School of Management.

Published in *Psychological Bulletin*, the study found diversity training can be successful—but that results vary widely based on the content and length of training and whether it was accompanied by other related initiatives.

"In today's political climate, diversity training has the potential to make a huge positive impact in addressing biases and prejudice within organizations," says Kate Bezrukova, PhD, associate professor of organization and human resources in the UB School of Management. "But training must be conducted thoughtfully. At best, it can engage and retain women and people of color in the workplace, but at worst, it can backfire and reinforce stereotypes."

Diversity training aims to enhance participants' cultural awareness, skills and motivation to interact with individuals of different ethnicities, genders, orientations, ages and more.

Bezrukova and her team examined more than 40 years of research, combining data from 260 studies and more than 29,000 participants across a variety of fields. They found [diversity training](#) had immediate positive effects on participants' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors related to diverse groups. Over time, however, their attitude and behavioral changes decayed or reverted, while their cultural knowledge remained consistent or even increased.

"The attitudes this training attempts to change are generally strong, emotion-driven and tied to our personal identities, and we found little evidence that long-term effects to them are sustainable," Bezrukova says. "However, when people are reminded of scenarios covered in training by their colleagues or even the media, they are able to retain or expand on the information they learned."

The study found training is most effective when it is mandatory, delivered over an extended period of time, integrated with other initiatives and designed to increase both awareness and skills. In addition, participants responded more favorably to programs that used several methods of instruction, including lectures, discussions and exercises.

"It's critical to offer diversity programs as part of a series of related efforts, such as mentoring or networking groups for minority professionals," Bezrukova says. "When organizations demonstrate a commitment to diversity, employees are more motivated to learn about and understand these societal issues and apply that in their daily interactions."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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