

# Researchers develop diversity intelligence scale for organizations

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University of Arkansas researchers have developed the first diversity intelligence scale that employers can use to ensure and improve diversity, inclusion and equity within their organizations.

The Hughes and Liang Diversity Intelligence Scale will advance human resource development by requiring leaders to possess and exhibit the knowledge to understand protected class employees and the legal mandates and executive orders established to protect these employees from discriminatory practices at work.

"Despite billions of dollars invested in diversity and anti-discriminatory practices training, many protected class workers remain underutilized or marginalized due to leaders' unfamiliarity with these groups of workers and/or incompetence to harness their talents to achieve organizational goals," said Clarethia Hughes, professor of human resource and workforce development in the College of Education and Health Professions. "Our tool will not only guide thinking and behavior to create a more inclusive organizational structure, but it could also save money and prevent headaches for organizations by reducing equal opportunity complaints and labor lawsuits."

Hughes and Xinya Liang, assistant professor of educational statistics and [research methods](#), use the definition of protected class provided by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Program, which describes "the groups protected from the employment discrimination by law. These groups include men and women on the basis of sex; any group which shares a common race, religion, color, or national origin; people over 40; and people with physical or mental handicaps. Every U.S. citizen is a member of some protected class, and is entitled to the benefits of EEO

law. However, the EEO laws were passed to correct a history of unfavorable treatment of women and minority group members."

Hughes synthesized information from a qualitative survey of organizational leaders to develop an 8-point, Likert-type scale that measures three areas: knowledge, education and training, and behaviors related to protected class employees. Likert scales are a type of survey that allow individuals to express how much they agree or disagree with a particular statement. The researchers then used the quantitative survey developed by Hughes to collect more information from leaders of protected class employees and to further quantify their level of diversity intelligence.

A [pilot study](#) was conducted on a sample of 97 workplace leaders, ranging from supervisors to executive-level managers, such as chief executive, chief financial and chief operating officers. These supervisors and managers had direct responsibility for one or more employees. Within the pilot study, the researchers surveyed two groups—diversity advisory group leaders and leaders in general areas. The researchers then conducted a quantitative study to validate the scale, collecting an initial sample 1,334 cases and final sample 1,180 cases. Each case represented a workplace leader.

The scale is based on the premise of diversity intelligence theory, which posits that organizational leaders need to possess diversity intelligence to successfully integrate all protected class employees into the workplace. The researchers sought to develop a tool to assist leaders in this effort.

In addition to fostering a healthy organizational structure and reducing labor lawsuits and equal employment opportunity complaints, the scale will:

- Improve leaders' understanding of protected class groups in the

workplace.

- Improve understanding of the effectiveness of compliance and diversity training.
- Improve employee performance as a result of improved [employee](#) morale.
- Provide access to a validated research tool that is useful for leaders in all fields.

Diversity is commonplace within globalized workplaces, but, despite millions of dollars expended on diversity training, managers and employees are often frustrated because of unrealized goals, discomfort and feelings of underutilization. Protected class employees are often described as not a fit for the organization.

"By developing and testing a tool for identifying and analyzing the level of a person's ability to be aware of and understand protected class employees and the legal mandates and policies to protect all employees from discriminatory practice, our research has the potential to promote social change and reduce workplace violence, microaggression and trauma," Hughes said.

Hughes manages a popular Facebook page focused on [diversity](#) intelligence. She said more than 150 people joined the Facebook group in the week following the death of George Floyd.

Hughes and Liang received funding from the Commercialization Fund, a subset of the University of Arkansas Chancellor's Fund. The Commercialization Fund is a \$1 million annual investment to help propel technologies with strong market potential to commercial readiness.

Provided by University of Arkansas

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