

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Advocacy and Training – The Big Misnomers

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At its core, DEI is about humanity. It is about treating everyone with respect and fairness. It is about fostering diversity, promoting equity, and cultivating inclusive environments. Why do DEI concepts sometimes elicit negative perceptions and emotions?

As the world continuously navigates the awareness of societal and organizational disparities, the spotlight inevitably turns towards the discipline of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). However, the mere mention of DEI sometimes elicits negative perceptions and emotions and there is where the big misnomers can be found.

When DEI is misunderstood or misrepresented it can lead to the spread of misinformation and ultimately increased disparities. This white paper, authored by a DEI practitioner with over 30 years of experience and who has worked with more than 20,000 participants, aims to provide accurate, truthful insights into DEI training. It seeks to dispel misconceptions and inaccuracies while shedding light on the often exaggerated, misnomers of DEI with the hope of fostering a clearer understanding.

Redefining Approaches: From Training to Transformational Workshops

Traditional training generally involves a formal presentation of information, with a predetermined agenda and planned outcomes occurring in a classroom setting. This model, however, falls short in capturing the essence of a well-executed DEI *training*. A more fitting description would be that of an engaging conversation-style workshop®. The DEI arena offers a vast array of workshop topics; however, this paper's focus is on the **foundational** conversation-style workshop®.

The goal, from a foundational perspective, is to create a safe space for participants to explore, examine, share, engage, and express thoughts, beliefs, and experiences while actively listening, which leads to solutions fostering a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace and society.

Empowering Transformation: The Essence of DEI Conversation-Style Foundational Workshops

The foundational conversation-style workshop® is the cornerstone of any productive DEI initiative. This initial step lays the groundwork for organizations to begin the DEI journey through a knowledge-filled gateway with shared understanding. Its primary objectives include the following:

- Fostering appreciation for diversity and celebrating differences among individuals.
- Infusing fairness, respect, and humanity into every facet of society and organizations.
- Cultivating awareness of one's socialization processes and its impact on beliefs and behaviors.
- Supporting organizational needs while enhancing comprehension of DEI concepts.
- Broadening the lens through which decisions shape policies, practices, and procedures.

Decoding the Critique: Addressing the Misunderstandings and Criticisms

DEI *training* often receives unwarranted criticism due to misconceptions and apprehensions surrounding its intent. These concerns can be attributed to various factors including:

1. **Fear of the Unknown:** Unfamiliarity with the content and processes involved.
2. **Vulnerability:** Sharing and hearing personal stories can be uncomfortable.
3. **Unconscious Biases:** The process of becoming aware of implicit biases can be uncomfortable.
4. **Learning Truths:** Reconciling historical facts and preconceived notions can be challenging.

Negative perceptions of DEI *training* typically happen because of one or more of the following:

1. **Inexperienced Facilitators:** Lack of skilled facilitators.
2. **Insufficient Content:** Lack of depth in knowledge, delivery, and engagement.
3. **Participant's Reservations:** Preconceived thoughts hindering active participation.
4. **Lack of Clarity:** Organization lacks clarity and/or miscommunication in introducing *training* to their workforce.

Setting the Record Straight: Misnomers vs. Facts

Misnomers:

- It promotes "them."
- It points blame and causes guilt.
- It is not productive.
- It fails to drive change.
- It promotes hiring people who are less qualified.
- It creates more harm.
- It divides people.
- Embracing DEI hurts someone.

VS

Facts:

- DEI promotes the **fair** treatment and **full** participation of **all** people.
- DEI promotes respect, humanity, truth, collaboration, and fairness.
- DEI workshops raise awareness and foster acceptance of diverse backgrounds.
- DEI equips organizations with tools to ensure success for all.
- DEI best practices lead to hiring the best candidates by broadening the applicant pool.
- DEI drives fairness, creativity, and innovation.
- Organizations benefit from diverse perspectives.
- Everyone has access and opportunity to thrive when DEI is fully embraced.

The Cruciality of DEI Conversation-Workshops: 8 Compelling Points

1. Inclusive cultures where employees feel and experience a sense of belonging are linked to higher business outcomes and higher performance. (Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters, McKinsey & Company, 2022)
2. DEI workshops combat division by promoting critical thinking and relationship building.
3. DEI transformation requires deliberate intentional focus.
4. DEI workshops counter unconscious and conscious unfairness.
5. DEI workshops foster principles of respect and fairness throughout organizations and society.
6. DEI workshops initiate positive change and explore solutions.
7. DEI workshops promote self-awareness through experiential learning.
8. DEI workshops provide tools to evaluate entrenched policies and drive change.

Developing Productive Workshops: What Sets DEI Conversational Workshops Apart?

- The facilitator's expertise in DEI's multifaceted aspects
- The facilitator's ability to engage participants while ensuring a safe, respectful environment
- Content's relevance, experiential nature, and alignment with organizational goals
- Interactive, engaging, and clear communication
- Realistic outcomes within a predetermined timeframe

Championing Inclusion: Who Benefits from DEI Conversation-Style Workshops?

1. Individuals and organizations wanting to contribute to a more humane world.
2. Organizations seeking a highly productive workforce aligned with changing demographics.
3. Organizations desiring to serve customers of broad, diverse backgrounds.

Empowering Change: Benefits of DEI Conversation-Style Workshops

For Organizations:

- Maximizing local and global talent
- Enhancing recruitment and talent retention
- Cultivating a culture of maximum potential and performance
- Gaining a competitive edge in the marketplace
- Enhancing services, creativity, innovation, and solution-finding
- Better at engaging diverse communities

For Individuals:

- Fostering self-awareness and inclusivity
- Contributing to organizations, communities, and the world
- Building connections and impacting culture positively
- Building relationships and effective communication skills
- Increasing understanding and education
- Unlocking maximum potential

Beyond the Workshop: Sustaining Transformation

The DEI foundational conversation-style workshop® is a starting point. Individuals drive the process, synergizing changes of the heart and mind with behavior and system change to ensure sustainable transformation. As DEI workshops empower change, sustained progress depends on organizational leaders' intent and follow-through. Progress continues through continued education, assessment, solution-finding, and collaboration.

For Reflection

DEI is about humanity, respect, and fairness while fostering diversity, promoting equity, and cultivating inclusive environments. What role will you play in positively influencing DEI?

"Truth includes both light and shadows, even when uncomfortable." - John Lewis