

**Diversity Research Project: Personal Attitudes and Experiences**

Alissa Kowalski, Phuong Le, Sharon Singh

Department of Leadership and Policy, Niagara University

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Dr. Polka & Dr. Marwaha

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Workplace diversity seems to have grown over the past few years. Many movements highlighting racism, discrimination, and equal opportunity employment have encouraged organizations to review and even make changes to diversity policies. Unfortunately experiencing discrimination in the workplace can be one of the most distressing, negative workplace behaviors that can be experienced and can contribute to heightened work-to-life conflict (Minnoette, 2012). With shifting demographics, the need for diversity within organizations only seems to increase. With the rise in minority populations, organizations are seeing more diverse applicants and are recognizing the need to create a diverse and include work environment (Brimhall et al., 2018).

Organizations that developed programs/training and events related to diversity, inclusion, and equity to educate and train leaders and employees can be beneficial for the organization. Grim (2020) found that a Fortune 100 company's bottom line improves when the organization values each employee's uniqueness. However, if the focus of these programs is mainly designed and provided for higher level managers you may not necessarily see the implementation or benefits of the training. (Anderson & Billings, 2010). Workforce diversity is important because it comes with benefits like generating new ideas (marketing strategy) and can improve a firm's growth (Kim, 2006). This includes training managers especially at the middle levels as they have been found to play an important role in following through with the implementation of diversity training (Anderson & Billings, 2010).

### **Research Problem**

There is more of a need to hire individuals from diverse backgrounds. With their unique cultures, backgrounds, languages, and skills, leaders and organizations need to understand these characteristics in orders to utilize these values and differences to develop and unify their organization for more success in the future. The change in diversity in America, referred to as

the “browning” of America because the minority population is increasing (Perez & Hirschman, 2009) and in Canada which is known for its multiculturalism (Statistics Canada, 2021). The growing minority population is also reflected in organizations that are receiving a more diverse applicant population and recognizing that there is a need to create a more diverse work environment (Brimhall et al., 2018). The need to understand diversity both within and outside of organizations, and how to benefit from it is essential and crucial for any organization to thrive and retain talents as a great human capital in this dual trend of globalization which was also mentioned by Kim (2006).

The main concerns surrounding organizations and diversity focus on whether organizations are willing to adapt the diversity trend so that diversity promotion and learning practice would create an impact on proficient organizational performance as well as how organizations construct the specific needs of diversity training for a diverse workforce. Kim (2006) discussed that diversity management is considered essential to ensuring success within organizations; she further explained that valuing diversity rather than just tolerating it actually benefits the employees and the organization. Utilizing results from Niagara University’s Reflective Diversity Study: A Study of Personal Attitudes and Experiences Survey, research will explore how diversity training within organizations might relate to direct interactions or observations of prejudice in the workplace.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study will examine the perception of people currently working in organizations toward diversity and inclusion at the workplace. Understanding people’s personal attitude and experiences about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) can help leaders discover specific needs for diversity training. By conducting a survey to evaluate the need and perception of diversity training, education and experience, this current study will hopefully bring beneficial

information for the DEI organizational policies.

This study also aims to create awareness of diversity sensitivity in order to embrace cultural diversity and cultural behavior in the workplace. Having a broader sense of diversity as well as a plan for designing diversity training could further benefit workplace environments.

### **Research Questions**

Q1. How do organizational members perceive the effectiveness of diversity training?

Q2. What are the perceptions of individuals about diversity?

Q3. What types of experiences have individuals had in relation to discrimination?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The data was collected by ADS750 students Alissa Kowalski, Phuong Le, and Sharon Singh using a survey “Reflective Diversity Inventory: A Study of Personal Attitudes and Experiences” was provided by Dr. Polka and Dr. Marwaha. The data was gathered from participants aged 21 years and older from a variety of professions from family and friends of the researchers. Surveys were distributed to 35 individuals via email, however, only 23 returned the survey, 23 of which were completed in full and can be used for analysis. According to Creswell (2018) surveys can provide researchers with a quantitative description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population, or tests for associations among variables of a population, by studying a sample of that population. However, this sample size and data collection does cause some limitations within the overall implications of the study as it is a small sample.

The overall goal of the survey was to explore the personal attitudes toward diversity and personal experiences with diversity. The survey was organized into four parts: Personal Attitudes Towards Diversity, Personal Experiences with Diversity Issues, Reflective Responses, and Demographic Data. Personal Attitudes and Personal Experiences were both measured on a 1-4 Likert scale. The directions for the survey instructed respondents to identify how they feel

about particular statements by circling 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*disagree*), 3 (*agree*), or 4 (*strongly agree*) for the Personal Attitudes section. The directions for Personal Experiences also instructed respondents to identify how often they were faced with certain situations by circling 1 (*never*), 2 (*sometimes*), 3 (*often*), and 4 (*very often*) to identify what best represented their experience. The final section of the survey consists of demographic data, having participants self-identify their gender, age range, ethnicity, sexual orientation, organizational diversity initiatives, disability status, and country of residence. The section for Reflective Responses, was designed to be an open-ended reflection and is not factored into this study as this is a quantitative study using secondary data analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

When working with the DEI concept, there might be sensitive issues related to minority groups or discrimination that could make people feel vulnerable or marginalized. Reminding participants about past experiences related to discrimination could have a negative impact on their consciousness. To understand people's perception of their own diversity and others' group diversity, being aware of the tension or sensitivity might affect their responses in the survey and is important when considering the reliability of the instrument.

An explanation of why the survey is being completed with some sensitive questions and that the responses are only for research purposes further reminding participants that their information will be kept confidential.

### **Analysis and Findings**

The results of the collected surveys will be discussed in the following sections based on the division of the survey itself: demographic results, personal experiences, and personal attitudes. Demographic results are being presented first then personal attitudes and finally personal experiences in order to provide context and background information to support the

findings of the rest of the survey data.

## **Demographics**

The data was gathered from participants ages 21 years and older from a variety of professions from family and friends of the researchers. Surveys were distributed to 35 individuals however, only 23 participants returned the survey and utilized for analysis as valid for the study. The demographics of the data include gender, different groups of age, ethnicities, sexual orientations, disability status, countries.

Among 23 participants, there were 12 males and 11 females who completed and returned the survey. The male participants were slightly higher than the female category, and the category “other” had none. The gender pool of this study is relatively balanced and comparable because male participants were 52.17% and females were 47.83%.

There were five different age groups in the initial survey, (1) under 24; (2) 24-33 years old; (3) 33-43 years old; (4) 44-53 years old; (5) 54 and older. There were only three age groups the participants indicated: 24-33 years old, 33-43 years old, and 44-53 years old. There were eleven participants from the group of 33-43 years old (47.83 %), nine of them from the 24-33 years old group (39.13%) and three of them from the 44-53 years old group (13.04%). There were no participants in the group of under 24 years old and 54 and older.

There were six categories for ethnicity in the survey. Based on the collected data, the majority of the participants were Caucasian and *other* categories, the rest of them were Asian and Latino/Hispanic. The highest number in the ethnicity pool were Caucasian with eleven participants, Asian with two, Latino/Hispanic with one and six of the participants indicated they were from other ethnicities. It would be interesting to know which ethnicity the participants were from who indicated “other” because they made up 39.13% of the population pool in this study. Unfortunately, there was not a blank space next the “other” category to allow the participant to

indicate their ethnicity.

The category disability, 100% of 23 participants indicated they did not have a disability. As a result, all the participants most likely did not experience discrimination or harassment in their daily work or life based on having a disability. This could help to narrow down the focus of the study when it comes to explaining the results as it relates to diversity attitudes and experiences. If participants experienced discrimination and harassment, disability would not be one of the situations they encountered to affect their attitude and/or experience.

Sexual orientation is another aspect of discrimination and harassment in the workplace, however in this study, there was only 1 participant who defined him/herself as homosexual and 22 participants defined themselves as heterosexual. It is possible that sexual orientation might not be a factor that affected participants' attitudes and experiences about diversity discrimination in this study. It seems clear that the participants in this study were not from the variety of sexual orientations, therefore, we could limit the factors about their discrimination and harassment related to their sexual orientation.

The survey of this study was delivered to participants living in the United States and Canada. There were 12 participants from the U.S. and 11 participants from Canada. It is relatively a fair contribution to the geographic perspective where the data were collected. This enriches the data because of the geopolitical differences of the two countries in regard to policy, politics, culture, and general attitude toward diversity. The expectation is there will be a distribution of attitude within the country's population, however, being able to get sizable contributions from both countries is helpful to the robustness of the data.

### **Personal Attitudes**

The survey consisted of 38 questions pertaining to personal attitudes towards diversity topics such as gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and race. The survey utilized a

Likert scale consisting of four options: 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*disagree*), 3 (*agree*), and 4 (*strongly agree*). Some questions had fairly consistent responses across the 23 participants while select questions had outliers within the responses, implying that different individuals have different values surrounding diversity attitudes.

Within the survey results, there was one question all 23 participants answered in the same manner. Question 19 asks participants to rank the statement: "I believe that organizations should provide a comfortable and safe place for all workforce members." All responses indicated 4 (*strongly agree*). This is a positive response because intolerance and inequity need to be acknowledged, addressed, and adjusted in order for society to progress. McIntosh (1988) recognizes this as a starting point, writing "To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions" (p. 168). There are still inequitable areas of society, but the overall positive response from participants shows that there is a positive trend in diversity attitudes, at least within these survey results.

Survey questions 13 and 14 both received universally positive responses, with all participants listing either 3 (*agree*) or 4 (*strongly agree*) as their answer. Question 13 states "Leaders should be responsible for promoting pride in the culture of their organization" and question 14 states "I can learn a great deal from people who have different cultural backgrounds." The universal support of these two statements shows that survey participants both feel like they can learn from other cultures and believe that leaders have an obligation to promote pride in their organizational culture. Unfortunately, additional survey questions indicate that these goals are not necessarily being accomplished in the opinion of survey participants. Question 18 states "My work organization is committed to celebrate cultural diversity and personal differences" and question 23 is "I believe I learn best about diversity by participating in professional development programs offered by an organization such as my workplace, school,



or religious institutions.” Neither of these questions have responses that point in one direction over the other as the responses span all four answers. This suggests that, although individuals want to learn from various cultures being guided by strong leadership, organizations aren’t meeting the needs of the survey participants.

In contrast to the survey questions with responses that are universally agree or disagree, there were certain questions that had outlier opposing answers. For example, question 20 states “I am confident in my ability to recognize my own biases/prejudice/intolerance through my ethno-cultural lens” and almost every participant selected either 3 (*agree*) or 4 (*strongly agree*). However, one individual chose 2 (*disagree*) as their response. Question 11 is “It is difficult for me to understand/empathize with people who are different from me.” Again, almost all of the participants selected similar responses with 22 individuals choosing either 1 (*strongly disagree*) or 2 (*disagree*) and again, one response was an outlier as one individual chose 4 (*strongly agree*). The final question with outlier responses was 32, which states “The terrorist attacks since September 11, 2001, have negatively affected my views of other cultures.” 20 individuals choose either 1 (*strongly disagree*) or 2 (*disagree*), however two selected 3 (*agree*) and one even chose 4 (*strongly agree*).

Overall, these survey questions show that, even though respondents universally agreed that workplaces should be safe for all individuals, there should be strong organizational support for diverse cultures, and that people can learn from those with different cultures, there are still individuals within that space who have varying degrees of support or understanding of diverse individuals due to personal bias or prejudice. Oftentimes, it is “a lack of understanding and appreciation of diversity” that can cause distress in the workplace, particularly among individuals with diverse backgrounds (Perales, 2022, p. 5). That being said, the participants were honest while taking the survey and expressed an interest in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives

which shows a positive trend.

### **Personal Experiences**

The personal experiences section of the survey asked participants to rate their experiences based on how often they were faced with certain situations by circling 1 (*never*), 2 (*sometimes*), 3 (*often*), and 4 (*very often*) to identify what best represented their experience. Questions 45, 49, 53 and 54 stood out as these responses were all the same.

After reviewing the following questions: 45 - I have witnessed racial/ethnic jokes/comments/slurs at my workplace, 49 - I have personally felt discriminated or harassed at my workplace because of my economic status, 53 - I have personally felt discriminated or harassed at my workplace because of my sexual orientation, and 54 - I have personally felt discriminated or harassed at my workplace because English is my primary language, it was interesting to see that all participants selected 1 (*never*) as their experience. This is certainly positive because within workplace environments research has indicated that individuals have experienced discrimination and harassment within workplace settings related to various factors including sexual orientation and race or ethnicity. Kim (2006) reported that ethnicity and race is one of the most discriminated against categories of diversity experienced in the workplace. Ely & Thomas (2020) explained that organizations can actually benefit from increased employee diversity, but there also needs to be adjustments to corporate culture and power dynamics. Creating a workplace environment where people can express themselves can prevent bias and systems of oppression (Ely & Thomas, 2020). Based on the responses for these questions perhaps the workplace environments are changing.

When looking at question 39 - I have witnessed racial discrimination in my workplace, two participants indicated 3 (*often*) and one participant indicated 1 (*sometimes*). This is roughly half of the participants who are witnessing racial discrimination in their workplace, but according

to the responses above have not personally felt discriminated against in relation to economic status, sexual orientation and speaking English.

On the other hand, after reviewing question 46 - I have personally felt discriminated against or harassed at my workplace tells a different story. Two of the participants indicated 4 (very often) and seven participants indicated 2 (sometimes). This indicates that while they may have not felt personal discriminated against or harassed in relation to economic status, sexual orientation and speaking English there were other reasons why they in fact felt discriminated against or harassed.

The final question reviewed is 55 - my work organization does value the diverse perspectives and ideas that come from staff members from different cultures and life experiences. Only two participants indicated 1 (never), while six participants indicated 2 (sometimes), eight indicated 3 (often) and five participants indicated 4 (very often). This seems to be positive because it does show that more organizations might be valuing diverse perspectives and ideas that come from staff members from different cultures and life experiences.

### **Limitations**

The results of this study were based on a small sample and was completed within a short period of time. The differences in demographic characteristics of the participants would impact the analysis of the results of which the researchers were not able to go over all the related factors such as other ethnicities, only the ones indicated on the survey. Recently the Black community has begun to disqualify the term African American because not all Blacks are from Africa, or they have lost their African identity during the time of slavery; narrowing the category to African American may be insensitive to diversity within the Black community (Eligon, 2020). This could be a reason 39.13 % of the survey population classified themselves as

“other.” Unfortunately, we will not know because we did not ask them to list what race they identified as under “other.”

Furthermore, Chinese, Russian, Middle Eastern, and South East Asian are all considered “Asian” and these cultures are very different, their appearances are very different, how they are seen in the community and treated are also very different. Backlash from COVID-19 has only increased negative attention towards those who look “Chinese” whereas more European looking Northern Asian participants may not receive the same treatment. These differences would not be reviewed within this study.

### **Conclusion**

When comparing the results of the personal attitudes and experiences to the identified research questions, there are areas of positive agreement and areas in need of improvement. For the question inquiring about the organizational members perception on the effectiveness of diversity training, it appears that respondents appreciate the trainings that are available to them and would like their organizational leaders to provide further training opportunities as well. The second question is related to perceptions about diversity as a whole. Responses for this question were mixed, as individuals seemed to appreciate diversity but were also open about their prejudice and potentially negative view on individuals who were different from them. The final question focused on personal experiences with discrimination, including witnessing discrimination. While most respondents did not experience any type of discrimination themselves, there were a large number of participants who witnessed discrimination with varying degrees of regularity.

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