

The Influence of Framing on Attitudes Toward Diversity Training

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Although diversity training is becoming an integral component of organizations, little empirical research on the topic exists. The study examined here investigated how framing of diversity training (title, focus of content, assignment) and gender influenced participants' attitudes. In this study, 160 adults (72 men, 88 women; 124 white; 36 minority) read a diversity course description and answered questions assessing their attitudes about the course and the organization. Results revealed that (1) a frame with a traditional title and a broad focus was responded to most favorably by participants, (2) men reacted more negatively than women to the diversity training course, and (3) men reacted more negatively than women to a frame with a narrow focus and remedial assignment. Findings are discussed in terms of the effect that different frames can have on participants' pretraining attitudes toward diversity training. Implications for researchers and consultants are also discussed.

It is readily apparent that the workforce is becoming more diverse (Pyle & Bond, 1997; U.S. Department of Labor, 2001). One method for managing this change in workforce composition has been to provide diversity training to employees. A survey conducted in 1991 found that more than 60 percent of the companies questioned were conducting diversity training programs or were planning to do so (Wheeler, 1994). This number increased to 66 percent in 2001 (Society for Human Resource Management, 2001). From these statistics, it is clear that diversity training is permeating the work environment. As the number of organizations that use diversity training increases, the content and rationale for providing this training are likely to change as well (Society for Human Resource Management, 2001; Wheeler, 1994).

Diversity training is no longer perceived as the socially responsible thing to do; instead, it is now viewed as a strategic business objective with the capability to make the organization more competitive (Cox, 1991; Plummer, 1998; Rynes & Rosen, 1995; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998). As Louw (1995, p. 23) asserts, "A more culturally sensitive and skilled workforce will enable organizations to compete in the global marketplace and to respond more effectively to the increasing diversity represented in their customers and clients." Ultimately, a goal of diversity training is for employees to learn how to work effectively with those who are different from themselves, as this will lead to an increase in business successes (Lindsley, 1998). By eliminating barriers such as stereotypes, employees can learn how those differences can hinder or strengthen work productivity (Noe & Ford, 1992; Wheeler, 1994).

In order for organizations to become more competitive, employees must think that the training program is worthwhile and in their best interest (Karp & Sammour, 2000). Because employee buy-in has been identified as an important component of successful training initiatives (Chrobot-Mason & Quiñones, 2002), organizations should be cognizant of the potential impact that framing could have on employees' attitudes toward training.

Theoretical Background

The design of training can be essential to the success of the initiative. Research has found a number of design techniques that increase the subsequent effectiveness of training programs. For example, research has shown that the inclusion of behavioral modeling (Gist, 1997) and the type of practice given during training (Holladay & Quiñones, *in press*; Schmidt & Bjork, 1992) can influence training outcomes. In regard to diversity training, the makeup of the trainees (that is, the percentage minority) has been explored as a critical design factor (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2001). This area of research is still in the preliminary stages, and further study of potential design elements is needed. One such element that should be taken into consideration for the design of diversity training programs is the program's framing.

Previous work on framing has demonstrated that it can have a substantial impact on decision making (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, 1984; Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). For example, individuals have been shown to make different decisions concerning monetary outcomes depending on whether the outcome is framed as a gain or a loss (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). These lines of research show that individuals are not rational decision makers but rather rely on contextual cues when interpreting situations (see also Goffman, 1974). More recently, a general conception and definition of framing that has emerged postulates that a frame is "a psychological device that offers a perspective and manipulates salience in order to influence subsequent judgment" (Rhoads, 1997).

Consistent with this general definition, scholars have begun to investigate the potential impact of framing on people's reactions to specific messages and

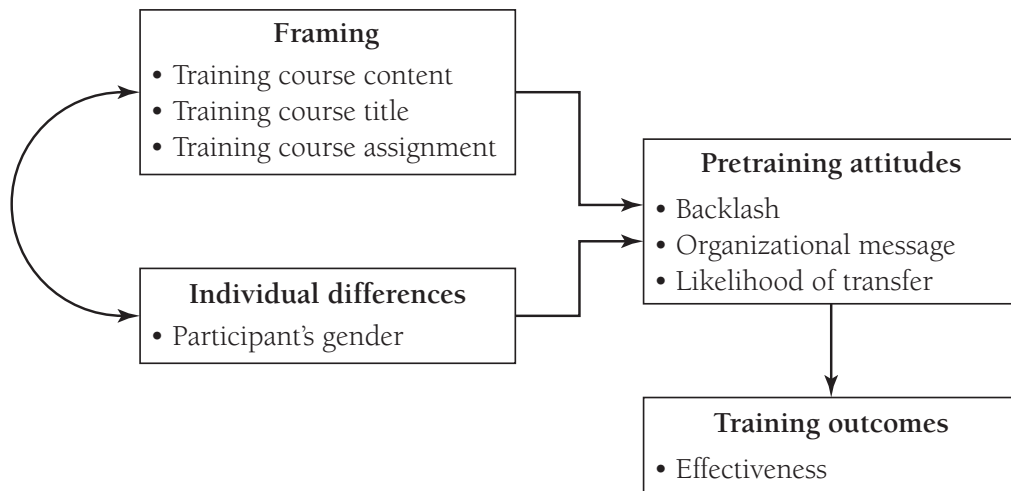
issues (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001; Shafir, Simonson, & Tversky, 1997). This line of research has effectively demonstrated that emphasizing or downplaying certain components of a message can sway and even completely alter people's preexisting attitudes and beliefs about an issue, especially when it is sensitive or controversial and has political, racial, or economic facets (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The frame can act as a perceptual lens that directs individuals' attention toward salient characteristics of a message.

Within the context of organizational communications, framing can affect workers' reactions to organizational changes (Bolman & Deal, 1991). For example, frames have been shown to affect potentially delicate and divisive organizational changes such as affirmative action plans and companywide layoffs (Greenberg, 1990; Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Drout, 1994). When affirmative action is framed as enhancing diversity, for example, reactions to the plan are more favorable than when it is framed as compensating for past injustices or hurting opportunities for whites, or when no frame is given at all (Doverspike, Taylor, & Arthur, 2000; Fine, 1992; Knight & Hebl, *in press*).

Although framing has been studied in a number of organizational contexts, little research has experimentally explored the potential effects that organizational message framing can have on workers' attitudes toward diversity training. This is surprising given the increasing implementation of diversity training programs and given Quiñones' assertion (1997) that "perhaps the most important aspect of framing effects is that organizations are potentially unaware of how the information they provide trainees is perceived and interpreted. Because of the ubiquitous nature of framing effects, the key is to find frames that serve to improve training effectiveness" (p. 190).

Quiñones implies that framing can in fact influence training effectiveness. Although this relationship may not be direct, framing and training effectiveness may be related through the two established relationships of framing and attitudes (Murrell et al., 1994) and between attitudes and training effectiveness (Alliger, Tannebaum, Bennett, Traver, & Shotland, 1997; see Figure 1). Specifically, Noe (1986) has argued that trainees who are both enthusiastic about training and have a desire to learn the content of the training program will demonstrate greater training effectiveness than trainees who are not so motivated. Correspondingly, Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas, and Cannon-Bowers (1991) demonstrated that pretraining attitudes and expectations and desires of participants had an impact on training effectiveness such that trainees with higher motivation to learn did in fact exhibit superior posttraining performance than trainees with lower motivation. Finally, Hanover and Cellar (1998) found that trainees' reactions to diversity training were related to self-perceptions of behavior. Specifically, the trainees, who had participated in the diversity training, indicated that they were engaging in more diversity practices (for example, encouraging the discussion of cultural differences among employees) than

Figure 1. Theoretical Model of the Influence of Framing and Gender on Pretraining Attitudes and Subsequent Training Outcomes



were their control counterparts. Therefore, through the influence of framing on the attitudes of trainees, there is an indirect but significant influence of framing on training effectiveness. Thus, framing becomes an important consideration when trainers are looking to increase the effectiveness of their training initiatives.

Focus of Training Course Content. Within the context of framing, there are several methods for influencing trainees' pretraining attitudes toward diversity training. For example, management can alter employees' perceptions of training programs through the information that they provide to organizational members regarding the content of a training class (Quiñones, 1997). Within the realm of diversity training, many organizations have historically made race the primary (if not exclusive) focus of their diversity training efforts. Although the implementation of these racially focused diversity training courses is clearly well intended, an unfortunate consequence has been a backlash by white male workers against these programs (Burke & Black, 1997). A serious problem within many diversity training programs is that groups not targeted by the initiatives (typically, white men) are unintentionally made to feel guilty, hypersensitive, or even resentful of diversity initiatives (Karp & Sammour, 2000).

Aside from angering white male employees, a training content that focuses exclusively on race might also lead other disenfranchised employees, such as women, older workers, disabled people, and gays and lesbians, to conclude that management is unconcerned with their group's needs and struggles. Even the purported beneficiaries of such narrowly focused course content, minority workers, might not react positively to the course if they believe that it will make them tokens within the organization (Jackson, 1999). Through framing diversity training courses to be broader in their focus, all employees can be made to feel validated and valued by the organization (Arredondo, 1996) and

can begin the process of understanding differences as a “resource for enhancing organizational growth and development” (Plummer, 1998, p. 184). Furthermore, a frame with a broad focus, which makes all differences salient versus the differences of any one group, has been proposed to lead to greater training success (Rynes & Rosen, 1995). As many companies, including Ford Motor Co. and 3M, move toward a broader focus in their diversity content (Hayles & Russell, 1997), it becomes necessary to understand the impact that this feature of framing can have on participants’ attitudes.

Training Course Title. Another means of framing and subsequently influencing employees’ pretraining attitudes is through the title given to the course. Within the past decade, the term *diversity* has become a frequently used buzzword, and it is quite possible that it has become loaded (Arredondo, 1996). That is, people often believe the word is simply a proxy for affirmative action, and they associate it only with racial or gender differences. Therefore even the use of the title “Diversity Training” might be enough to create negative impressions of the training course.

As an alternative, some organizations have begun to use more encompassing titles to describe their diversity initiatives. For example, organizations have used titles such as “Cross-Cultural Awareness,” “Working Together,” and “Valuing Differences” (Wheeler, 1994, p. 11). The rationale behind this approach is to avoid any backlash associated with the term *diversity* and to encourage managers to think of being able to manage diversity effectively as a necessary subset of being a good leader (Arredondo, 1996). If this approach is used in an organization, then a course framed with a more encompassing title, such as “Building Human Relations,” might increase employee buy-in to the value of training and decrease negative reactions to a diversity training course.

Training Assignment. A final way that framing can have an impact on the effectiveness of the training course is through the assignment to a particular training class (Quiñones, 1997). Previous studies illustrate how labeling conveys specific connotations to the trainees through assignment to a remedial/threat or advanced/opportunity course (Martocchio, 1992; Quiñones, 1995). For example, in a study by Quiñones (1995), some trainees were told that their performance was below standard and they needed to attend a “remedial” training course. Other trainees were told their performance was above standard and they were being assigned to an “advanced” training course. In reality, both courses were identical except for these labels. The labels had an impact on the trainees’ level of motivation and subsequent level of learning. Thus it is clear that negative reactions can be associated with training courses that highlight the low performance of employees (Martocchio, 1992; Quiñones, 1995). Courses that emphasize the superior performance of employees are associated with more positive reactions.

In relation to diversity training, it may be that assignment to a remedial condition implies that the underlying reason for the training is compliance with federal regulations. In addition, white men might feel that they are being

blamed for the remedial standing of the organization. However, assignment to the advanced condition may imply that the organization is proactive and cares about the initiative. Thus this study will investigate how this feature of framing (assignment) influences trainees' pretraining attitudes towards diversity training.

Gender. The relationship between participant gender and attitudes about diversity has not been fully explored, though some research has shown that women are more supportive of implementing diversity training than are men. This pattern would be expected if the training content included a focus on gender; however, the reason why women remain supportive of diversity training that focuses exclusively on race is less easily intuited. Kluegel and Smith (1983) speculate that this is due to women's sense of cooperative self-interest. That is, women believe that initiatives that help other disenfranchised groups will indirectly help raise awareness of the discrimination and struggles that they face in the workplace.

Conversely, white male workers are rarely the recipients of discrimination, so they typically are unlikely to believe that a diversity program would be beneficial to an organization (Faludi, 1991). They are also unlikely to feel that they have much to gain from attending such a course, as many feel that they are there only to be attacked for past organizational injustices, thus creating a backlash effect (Burke & Black, 1997). Male backlash has been defined as "any form of resistance men exhibit toward policies, programs and initiatives undertaken by organizations to promote the hiring and advancement of marginalized employees" (Burke & Black, 1997, p. 934). Although backlash seems logically to apply to white males, it may also apply to minority males who do not wish to highlight their minority status. Thus, given the backlash effect, men would be expected to have more negative attitudes toward diversity training than would women.

In addition to the expectation of diversity initiatives producing differences in men and women's attitudes, it is possible that the framing of a diversity initiative could produce differences in men's and women's pretraining attitudes. Specifically, men and women have different experience bases that may be relevant to the training itself (Smith-Jentsch, Jentsch, Payne, & Salas, 1996). Thus it would follow that men and women would see diversity training through different lenses. For example, Burke and Black (1997) have argued that men have been made to feel as if they are the "bad guys." Such a feeling could be exaggerated through a frame (the training assignment) and thereby engender different pretraining attitudes between men and women.

Training Outcomes. A number of key constructs have been identified in research to assess the effectiveness of training. Specifically, researchers have kept in accordance with Kirkpatrick's emphasis (1976) on reactions to training and have noted the importance of variables such as motivation to attend (Rynes & Rosen, 1995), backlash (Karp & Sammour, 2000), feelings of utility (Hollister, Day, & Jesaitis, 1993), affect toward organizations (such as

commitment and attraction; Miller, 1994), and transfer (Goldstein, 1993). Although this research has focused primarily on the outcomes of training, pre-training reactions are equally important in the design of a successful training program (Tannenbaum et al., 1991). Influencing pretraining attitudes is generally neglected, but crucial to ensuring favorable training outcomes.

Statement of Purpose. Given organizations' current practice of implementing diversity training as a competitive business strategy, removing potential barriers before the initiative begins is essential. Focusing on elements of training design, such as how to frame the initiative, is one method for removing the potential barriers. This study seeks to determine (1) how the framing of diversity training (through focus of training content, course title, and training assignment) influences participants' pretraining attitudes, (2) how the participant's gender influences his or her pretraining attitudes, and (3) how the framing and participant's gender interact to affect pretraining attitudes. Therefore the following hypotheses are under investigation in this study:

HYPOTHESIS 1. *Framing will have an effect on pretraining attitudes. Specifically, a broad focus, a comprehensive title, an advanced assignment, or a combination of these features will lead to more positive pretraining attitudes.*

HYPOTHESIS 2. *The participant's gender will have an effect on pretraining attitudes: female participants will respond more favorably than men to a diversity training initiative.*

HYPOTHESIS 3. *The participant's gender and framing will interact to influence pretraining attitudes: men will respond more negatively than women in their pretraining attitudes to a frame with a narrow focus, a traditional title, a remedial assignment, or a combination of these features.*

Method

This research was conducted in order to empirically evaluate the effects of framing and gender on attitudes toward a diversity program, using a sample of employees from a number of organizations.

Participants and Data Collection Procedures. Data were collected from 160 adults (72 men, 88 women; 124 white, 36 minority; 30 M.B.A. students, 130 organization employees) ranging from twenty to sixty-nine years of age ($M = 34.18$, $SD = 10.82$). This number of participants was sufficiently large to ensure adequate power to test the hypothesized relationships. The recruitment process took place through e-mails sent to managers at corporations in a very large metropolitan area and to students in an M.B.A. program at a midsized university. There is no way to determine the response rate because these managers were free to disseminate the e-mail to the employees. Due to the confidentiality guaranteed to participants, organizational data (company name and size) were not collected. The employees and M.B.A. students were used as participants

for the following reasons: (1) many students and employees are required to have diversity training (46 percent of the sample have previously participated in diversity training), (2) they are representative of individuals who work, (3) most M.B.A. programs are trying to become more diverse in population (Silverman, 2002), and (4) they represent a variety of different industries.

Participants volunteered to participate in the study by following a Web link provided in an e-mail invitation. The e-mail also included a contact e-mail address for any questions or problems (though no problems were reported) and approximate time for completion (ten to fifteen minutes, as determined by a pilot study). Participants were able to take as long as they needed to complete this Web-based study because the Web site did not time out.

After reading directions, participants were randomly assigned to an experimental condition. After reviewing the course description, they read directions instructing them to answer several questions and to provide demographic information on their race, gender, age, and prior participation in diversity training. The final page of the Web-based questionnaire debriefed participants and thanked them for their participation. The debriefing informed participants of the purpose of the study and rationale for the questions included in the questionnaire.

Participant responses were sent electronically and anonymously to the experimenters; no identifying information, such as Internet protocol (IP) address, name, or organization, was transmitted, ensuring confidentiality. The Web-based study was chosen for its efficiency and ease in reaching a number of people with the least amount of intrusion. Also, research has shown that a greater response rate can be achieved through use of Web-based studies (Thompson, Surface, Martin, & Sanders, 2002).

Instrumentation. Each participant read a course description that included an introduction, course objectives, and a note to employees, followed by attitude and demographic questionnaires. This course description was pilot-tested for its readability, indicating a reading level of 12 based on its content and sentence structure (FORCAST Readability Index formula; Stricht, 1975).

Because no previous research has assessed participants' pretraining attitudes toward the framing of diversity training and to ensure validity, items were developed to tap into key theoretical constructs (such as transfer) identified in the literature. This attitude questionnaire was ultimately composed of twenty-three items designed to quantitatively assess pretraining attitudes to the course description. Participants rated each statement using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). These twenty-three items (overall Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) were factor-analyzed using a principal components factor analysis with a varimax rotation to ensure the factors were unrelated (Tabachnick & Fidell 2001); only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were retained. As noted in Table 1, two items were dropped after examining the loadings, leaving twenty-one items (overall Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$), which were used to form the three composite dependent

Table 1. Dependent Measures: Item Means by Scale and Factor Loadings

Scale	Mean	Factor Loadings
<i>Organizational message</i> (25.40%, M = 3.0, Eigenvalue = 11.14, Reliability $\alpha = .92$)		
This training course would be a competitive advantage to the organization.	3.21	.739
I would be interested in attending this training course.	3.23	.704
I would be motivated to attend more courses dealing with these topics.	2.72	.699
This training course would increase my pride in being a member of this organization.	2.93	.686
This training course would increase my attraction to this organization.	2.82	.678
This training course should be mandatory for all employees in my organization.	3.28	.644
I would be motivated to attend this course.	3.23	.637
This training course would be useful to my organization.	3.57	.635
This training course would increase my level of commitment to the organization. ^a	2.77	.539
This training course should be mandatory only for management in my organization. ^a	2.04	-.338
<i>Likelihood of transfer</i> (24.93%, M = 3.17, Eigenvalue = 1.75, Reliability $\alpha = .93$)		
I feel that this training course would change my <i>attitudes</i> toward others once on the job.	2.92	.813
This training course would motivate me to interact with people who differ from me in my organization.	2.97	.806
This course would increase my comfort in interacting with people of another race at my organization.	3.01	.805
This course would increase my comfort in interacting with people of another gender at my organization.	2.74	.757
This course would increase my comfort in interacting with people of another lifestyle at my organization.	3.01	.729
This training course would improve the working environment in my organization. ^b	3.29	.578
I feel that this training course would increase my awareness of diversity in the workplace.	3.62	.573
I would use the <i>behaviors</i> learned in this training course back on the job.	3.52	.569
I feel that I could use the knowledge that I learned from this training course on the job.	3.50	.548
<i>Backlash</i> (10.97%, M = 2.35, Eigenvalue = 1.21, Reliability $\alpha = .69$)		
I feel that this training course was meant to sensitize white males in my organization.	2.71	-.839
This training course would create too much of a “politically correct” atmosphere in my organization.	2.67	-.672
I feel personally threatened by this training course.	1.83	-.587
I feel that this course would create a backlash against diverse groups in my organization.	2.16	-.530

^aBecause this item loaded at an unacceptable level on factor 1, it was not compiled with those items to form the composite measure for *organizational message*.

^bBecause this item did not theoretically correspond with the items in factor 2, it was not compiled with those items to form the composite measure for *likelihood of transfer*.

measures. Accounting for 61.31 percent of the total variance, the three factors were (1) *organizational message*, consisting of measures that evaluated the participants' perception of the initiative in relation to the organization, (2) *likelihood of transfer*, measuring the extent to which participants felt that the training course was applicable to their job, and (3) *backlash*, measuring the extent to which participants felt backlash would occur as a result of the training course.

Statistical Analyses and Design. The two independent variables in this study were gender and framing of the training course. In order to explore the effects of framing on attitudes toward diversity training, framing was operationalized through three features: focus of training content, course title, and training assignment.

The first feature, focus of training content, was operationalized as either narrow (for example, "Participants will be asked to attend a lecture on racial issues in the workplace") or broad (for example, "Participants will be asked to attend a lecture on issues such as racial, gender, lifestyle, and personality differences in the workplace"). The second feature, course title, was operationalized as either "Diversity Training" (the traditional title) or "Building Human Relations" (the comprehensive title). The latter title, selected from a pool of six actually used by organizations (Wheeler 1994), was chosen because it was rated most positively in a pilot study. To operationalize the third feature, training assignment, the course was framed as either remedial (for example, "After benchmarking with other companies in our industry, it has become apparent that our company is well below the average in turning individual differences into opportunities") or advanced (for example, "After benchmarking with other companies in our industry, it has become apparent that our company is well above the average in turning individual differences into opportunities").

All statistical analyses were conducted using multiple linear regressions. This has been cited as the preferred method for testing designs similar to that of our study (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). In the regression model the pretraining attitudes (perception of backlash, perception of likelihood of transfer, and perception of organizational message) were predicted from the independent variable framing (title, focus, and assignment) for hypothesis 1, the independent variable gender for hypothesis 2, and the interaction between framing and gender for hypothesis 3. (See Table 2 for the means and intercorrelations for independent and dependent variables.) Prior to testing the hypothesized relationships, we wanted to ensure that prior experience with diversity training did not have an impact on participants' pretraining attitudes. We found that there was no relationship between trainee characteristics, such as previous participation in diversity training, and pretraining attitudes (r 's < .13). We further examined the potential moderating effect of previous participation in diversity training on the relationship between framing and pretraining attitudes and found no significant effect (p 's > .05).

Table 2. Means and Intercorrelations for Independent and Dependent Measures

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Independent measures</i>									
1. Title ^a	1.50	.50	—						
2. Focus ^b	1.50	.50	-.50	—					
3. Assignment ^c	1.50	.50	-.01	.01	—				
4. Gender ^d	1.50	.50	-.03	-.11	.00	—			
<i>Dependent measures</i>									
5. Likelihood of transfer	3.17	.82	-.08	.07	-.04	.16*	—		
	3.03 ₁	.86 ₁							
	3.29 ₂	.78 ₂							
6. Backlash	2.30	.72	.09	-.04	-.06	-.31**	-.43**	—	
	2.54 ₁	.70 ₁							
	2.10 ₂	.68 ₂							
7. Organizational message	3.13	.80	.01	.07	-.04	.23**	.80**	-.52**	—
	2.98 ₁	.79 ₁							
	3.26 ₂	.79 ₂							

Note: A subscript of 1 represents the means and standard deviations for men. A subscript of 2 represents the means and standard deviations for women.

^aCoded 1 = "Diversity Training," 2 = "Building Human Relations."

^bCoded 1 = narrow, 2 = broad.

^cCoded 1 = remedial, 2 = advanced.

^dCoded 1 = men, 2 = women.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

This study employed an experimental design as these three features of framing (focus, title, and assignment) were manipulated and combined to form eight course descriptions and thereby eight conditions. The design was between-subjects, meaning that participants were randomly assigned to read one of the eight course descriptions (resulting in twenty participants in each condition). For example, in condition 1, participants read a course description with a traditional title, narrow focus, and remedial assignment; participants in condition 2 read a course description with a traditional title, broad focus, and remedial assignment.

Results and Interpretation

The data revealed that each of the three dependent measures was normally distributed, and there were no outliers more than three standard deviations from the mean. Consequently, no transformations were performed. Any missing data points were replaced with the grand mean. Table 3 shows a summary of the multiple linear regression analyses (only significant findings are discussed).

Table 3. Summary Table of Results from Regression Analyses

		Backlash (β)	Organizational Message (β)	Likelihood of Transfer (β)
Title		.07	.06	-.07
Focus		-.07	.11	.08
Assignment		-.06	-.05	-.04
Gender		-.31**	.24*	.17*
R^2	.11		.06	.04
Title \times Focus		.81*	-.61	-.74*
Title \times Assignment		-.21	-.03	-.19
Title \times Gender		.41	-.03	-.54
Focus \times Assignment		-.16	.10	-.04
Focus \times Gender		-.05	.20	.27
Assignment \times Gender		.28	-.07	-.31
ΔR	.05		.05	.06
Title \times Focus \times Assignment		.19	1.42	2.12
Title \times Focus \times Gender		-1.51	.45	2.42
Title \times Assignment \times Gender		-.86	.95	.99
Focus \times Assignment \times Gender		-2.81*	-.51	-1.47
ΔR	.03		.01	.05
Title \times Focus \times Assignment \times Gender		-1.43	2.57	3.68
ΔR	.00		.00	.00
Total R^2	.19		.12	.15

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

Framing. Hypothesis 1 stated that a frame with a broad focus, a comprehensive title, an advanced assignment, or a combination of these features will lead to more positive pretraining attitudes toward the course. There were no significant main effects for any of the features of framing on backlash, likelihood of transfer, or organizational message (see Table 3). However, the two-way interaction between title and focus of course content significantly influenced the perceptions of backlash ($\beta = .812$, $p = .02$) and the likelihood of transfer ($\beta = -.74$, $p = .03$). Table 4 shows how a frame with a traditional title and broad focus reduced the perception of backlash and increased the perception of the likelihood of transfer in comparison to the frames with a traditional title and narrow focus, a comprehensive title and narrow focus, and a comprehensive title and broad focus.

Although we found no support for any single feature of framing having an effect on participants' pretraining attitudes, we did find that the features of framing together had an impact on attitudes. These findings indicate that it is not enough to consider one feature of framing by itself; multiple features (both peripheral and central) need to be considered in conjunction, contributing to a vast and robust body of literature that shows the remarkable effects that framing can have on people's attitudes (Fletcher & Chalmers, 1991; Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Goldstein & Weber, 1997; Kinder & Sanders, 1990).

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Interactions on Perception of Backlash and the Perception of Likelihood of Transfer

	Title		Gender			
	Traditional		Comprehensive			
	M	SD	M	SD	Men	Women
Backlash						
Focus: Narrow	2.38	.73	2.28	.73	2.83	.83
	2.11	.59	2.46	.67	2.49	.62
Focus: Broad						
Assignment: Remedial						
Assignment: Advanced						
Focus: Narrow	2.39	.66	2.29	.63	2.39	.66
	2.52	.71	1.89	.49	2.52	.71
Focus: Broad						
Likelihood of transfer						
Focus: Narrow	3.04	.76	3.19	.88		
	3.40	.79	3.01	.82		
Focus: Broad						

Two features of framing, title and focus, did influence participants' perceptions of backlash and the likelihood of transfer. Although this study was restricted to participants' perceptions of the likelihood of transfer, past research has shown that the perception of transfer does lead to eventual transfer (Alliger et al., 1997). Furthermore, although we predicted that the "Diversity Training" title would be received less favorably, the participants in this study seemed to appreciate the directness of such a title in combination with another feature of framing. Thus, to enhance the perceptions of the likelihood of transfer and reduce the perception of backlash, the findings indicate use of a frame with "Diversity Training" as the title and a broad focus for course content.

Participant Gender. Our second hypothesis predicting an effect of participants' gender on their attitudes toward the diversity training was supported. There was a significant effect of gender on backlash ($\beta = -.312, p < .001$), organizational message ($\beta = .242, p < .01$), and likelihood of transfer ($\beta = .169, p = .035$). Exploration of the means revealed that male participants perceived greater organizational backlash, evaluated the organizational message less favorably, and perceived the likelihood of transfer to be lower than did female participants (see Table 2).

This finding supports research stating that men react with backlash to diversity training initiatives (Faludi, 1991). The more negative attitudes toward the benefit of the training course seem in part due to the fact that men may see the initiative as an attack against them (consistent with their heightened perception of backlash) and as providing no benefit to them (consistent with their reduced perception of transfer). These findings show the importance of considering gender when designing training courses. However, the interaction among the features of framing and gender provides measures that can be taken to lessen negative reactions from trainees.

Interactions. Hypothesis 3 stated that there would be an interaction between framing and the participants' gender. Specifically, men and women were expected to respond differently in their pretraining attitudes to the framing of a diversity training initiative. The following analyses were conducted to examine this interaction.

There was a significant three-way interaction between focus, assignment, and gender on perception of backlash ($\beta = -2.811, p = .039$). The marginal means presented in Table 4 show that men perceived the most backlash when the training focus was narrow and assignment was remedial. Women perceived the least backlash when focus was broad and assignment was advanced. Other trends in the data show that when focus was narrow, men perceived more backlash when the assignment was remedial than advanced, whereas women perceived more backlash when the assignment was advanced than remedial. However, when the focus of content was broad, women perceived less backlash when the assignment was advanced than when the assignment was remedial, and men perceived no real difference between remedial or advanced assignment.

A possible explanation for this finding is that male participants saw the training as a personal attack because they were not included in the focus of the content and may have been hypersensitive to the fact that they were being told they were “behind.” However, in our study, the negativity and backlash that male participants exhibited was reduced when the focus of the content was framed to be more inclusive. It seems that a simple change to frame the training to include men can serve to ameliorate the backlash effects.

Women perceived backlash from a remedial assignment and narrow focus frame, but they were most positively influenced by a broad focus and advanced assignment. An explanation for this finding could be that women feel valued by the organization when the training is more inclusive and advanced. These two features of framing may indicate that the organization has taken positive steps toward making diversity a competitive advantage. These findings lend empirical credence to the recommendation by many researchers and consultants to frame diversity training as having a broad focus and also extend research showing that remedial assignment should not be highlighted to trainees (Quiñones, 1995). Thus the recommendation of a frame with advanced assignment and broadly focused content could serve to ameliorate the negative reactions of men and women by making everyone feel included.

Discussion

Although human resource managers and consultants often discuss the importance of the content of a diversity training course (Roberson et al., 2001) or the title of the course (Wheeler, 1994), to date no empirical research has been conducted to assess the impact of these features on employees' pretraining attitudes. Furthermore, the assignment of trainees to programs is a sensitive area that management should consider because it sends a message to employees about their standing on diversity issues. As a result, organizations should be cognizant of either the potential benefits or the possible damage that can result from framing diversity training in certain ways.

The impact of framing of training initiatives becomes increasingly vital because training is the preferred method for managing diversity (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998). This study provides specific recommendations for how human resource managers should label the initiative, what content to focus on, and how to assign individuals to the training course. Specifically, they need to be sensitive to the different groups taking part in the initiative, making an effort to accommodate all groups and to the specific perceptions they are trying to influence. For the likelihood of transfer, for both men and women and remedial and advanced assignments, diversity training with a broadly focused content frame would be the most effective. For reducing the perception of backlash, a narrowly focused content and remedial assignment frame would be ineffective for both men and women, but framing with a more broadly focused content could ameliorate these negative perceptions for both groups.

Limitations

The small number of minority participants precluded our ability to examine race as a factor. In addition to race, other characteristics, such as tenure and occupation, should be considered in future studies because they might influence people's experiences with diversity and diversity training. In addition, those without access to the Internet were precluded from participating. However, most organizations now allow their employees access to the Internet using company computers. Moreover, M.B.A. students are typically allowed access to computers through their universities. Finally, the participants in our study did not actually attend training, and consequently it was participants' perceptions, and not actual attitudes, that were assessed. Although we were unable to examine the extent to which pretraining attitudes influenced actual training effectiveness, our study provides a unique and novel perspective concerning the effects of framing on pretraining attitudes to diversity initiatives.

Conclusion

This study has provided consultants and researchers with a new direction of framing for the design of diversity initiatives. Specific measures have been offered to enhance participants' attitudes toward diversity training initiatives, which should subsequently enhance training effectiveness. We hope that as future empirical studies extend the research on frames that ultimately enable positive outcomes to be achieved from diversity initiatives, these training programs can become a source of competitive advantage and aid organizations in their efforts to become more diverse.

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