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COMMENTARY

# Why is training the only answer?

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Industrial and organizational (I-O) psychologists love proposing training—if only we could get the right training!—to solve problems of harassment and discrimination (Hayes et al., 2020; Medeiros & Griffith, 2019). In their focal article, Hayes et al. call training a "natural starting point" (2020, 120). However, we contend here—as we have before (Bergman, 2018, 2019; Bergman et al., 2016)—that training will not solve the problem. It might contribute to a reduction in the problem, but it is not the panacea that I-O psychologists believe it would be.

The suggestion that even the ideal antiharassment and antidiscrimination training is effective for everyone is questionable. The reality is that people are shaped to a large degree by the society in which they live, and some cannot simply be trained out of their biases and behaviors. Organizations can minimize the necessity for such training by reconceptualizing the minimum qualifications for adequate job performance to include the interpersonal skills that support an inclusive environment in which everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. Many of these knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) would likely be applicable across positions, as certain attitudes and behaviors are generalizable.

Therefore, this commentary provides an alternative view to Hayes et al. (2020), arguing that we should consider the many other tools that I-O psychologists have that could help reduce harassment and discrimination in organizations, specifically (a) competency modeling, (b) selection, (c) recruitment, (d) performance management and appraisal, and (e) policy analysis. No one tool will be the magic wand that ends harassment and discrimination (Bergman, 2019; Sackett & Shewach, 2017). Rather, we contend that using all of our tools, rather than just training, is more likely to bring about change.

Note that herein we refer to harassment and discrimination and not just sexual harassment and racial discrimination, as did Hayes et al. (2020). Understandably, Hayes et al. narrowed their topics in order to provide a comprehensive literature review and focused on the specific forms of harassment and discrimination for which there is more training research. However, because we are writing about general processes, this was not necessary for us to do. Further, because intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Settles, 2006) indicates that systems of oppression are linked, singling out specific kinds of harassment and discrimination as being in need of reduction—and remaining silent in the face of others—is less effective than addressing any and all harassment and discrimination. Finally, in some places we will discuss reducing harassment and discrimination, whereas in others we will discuss increasing diversity and inclusion (D&I); we consider the former to be an important subset of the latter.

## Promoting diversity and inclusion via organizational processes

### *Competency modeling*

It is odd that training is considered a "natural starting point" (Hayes et al., 2020, p. 120) for ameliorating harassment and discrimination when the bedrock of our field is job analysis and competency modeling. Hayes et al. are clearly arguing that engaging in less sexual harassment and racial discrimination is a skill that can be learned. But what is this competency? What are the KSAOs that are linked to improving D&I? Competency modeling for D&I KSAOs would follow the steps used to model any other competency (Campion et al., 2011). It is likely that there are general D&I KSAOs that are consistent across jobs and organizations and specific D&I KSAOs that are pertinent to the particular job and/or organization. It is also likely that a D&I competency will have numerous KSAOs linked to it. Research suggests that general D&I KSAOs include self-awareness of biases, empathy, active listening, and tolerance for ambiguity (Chang & Tharenou, 2004; Chrobot-Mason, 2003; Gregory & Oullette, 1995; Hays-Thomas et al., 2012). In a review of the counseling and organizational psychology literature on multicultural competence, Chrobot-Mason (2003) identified 20 common competencies, which organizations could use as a reference guide.

If this competency is new to an organization or a position, incumbent employees should also be expected to have or develop it. Incumbents found to be lacking in these competencies should be provided with training opportunities; however, if these employees fail to adhere to organizational standards regarding D&I policies and procedures following these training sessions, they should face organizational disciplinary consequences (e.g., being placed on probation, having negative performance reviews, being placed on a performance improvement plan, being terminated).

### *Recruitment*

To generate viable candidates, organizations should use messaging strategies that clearly signal the antiharassment and antidiscrimination competencies that are required in the position. This includes updating the job description and stating that these competencies will be prioritized and assessed, and only qualified candidates will be considered. Ideally, this will deter applications from people uninterested in inclusion or invested in status hierarchies (Umphress et al., 2007). This is ultimately good for organizations that want to stop harassment and discrimination because an inclusive climate is associated with greater employee well-being, sense of distributive justice (Findler et al., 2007), job satisfaction, organizational commitment (Hwang & Hopkins, 2015), employee helping behavior, creativity, and job performance (Chung et al., 2020).

Further, emphasizing the D&I competency in the recruitment process could increase organizational attractiveness for people from minoritized groups because it signals that the organization promotes not only diversity but also a climate for inclusion (Mor Barak, 2015). This suggests that in addition to including this competency in recruitment materials, recruiting for the position should follow state-of-the-science practices for increasing the diversity of the applicant pool, such as detailing the organization's values with respect to D&I in the advertisement, including images that reflect *actual* organizational demographic makeup, and targeting professional networks that focus on women and members of minoritized groups. Obviously, recruitment from internal sources should be avoided if the organization is attempting to move away from a prior negative interpersonal history, or consider referrals only from employees with demonstrated D&I competencies.

### *Selection*

Once a competency for antiharassment and antidiscrimination has been developed, a sensible next step is to select for this competency. This will require new assessment tools that reflect the competency. As noted in the section on competency modeling, there are likely to be some KSAOs that

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are relevant across jobs and organizations. We consider how employers can measure applicants' diversity-related attitudes and check on their past D&I behavior. We also discuss the tension between different important competencies in selection.

### *Diversity-related attitudes*

Several measures exist that either directly assess attitudes toward diversity or measure characteristics strongly related to these attitudes. For example, the Attitudes Toward Diversity Scale (Montei et al., 1996) assesses employee attitudes toward having coworkers and supervisors who are minorities, and the hiring and promotion of people from minoritized groups. Findings show that those with more positive attitudes toward diversity are more motivated to work in diverse groups (Nakui et al., 2011). Similarly, people high in social dominance orientation (SDO; a belief that members of high-status groups are superior to low-status groups) support maintenance of the existing social hierarchy (Pratto et al., 1994), which can affect their workplace behaviors. For example, research has shown that SDO is negatively associated with the likelihood of selecting a woman or Black workgroup applicant (Umphress et al., 2008).

A challenge to measuring diversity attitudes for selection purposes is the potential for faking. With the increased societal attention to harassment, discrimination, and other diversity related issues in the wake of #MeToo, #TimesUp, and #BlackLivesMatter, job applicants know that many organizations are concerned about increasing organizational diversity and may attempt to fake good on any diversity-related assessment. However, perspectives differ on whether faking is a poor predictor of selection outcomes. It is possible, in line with Hogan et al. (2007), that "successful" faking could signal that a job applicant at least understands what attitudes toward diversity should be, allowing organizations, at minimum, to eliminate applicants who lack even that degree of awareness.

### *Behavior during past employment*

One of the truisms of psychological science is that past behavior predicts future behavior. Thus, applicant references should be asked about discrimination and harassment behaviors and D&I attitudes. However, fearing libel claims, employers are reluctant to provide letters of recommendation and will do little more than confirm the former employee's tenure with the organization (Halbert & Maltby, 1998). It is likely that this will be even more the case when considering reference checks on harassment and discrimination behaviors and D&I attitudes.

As a result, employers have turned to social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) in an attempt to assess applicants' so-called true personalities and identify past histories of deviant behavior (Salm, 2017). In the United States, there are few legal restrictions on employers viewing an applicant's social media during the selection process; however, there remain legal and ethical concerns. Legally, the practice is risky. Using social media as an assessment tool is problematic because it is not currently standardized across platforms, raters, or populations, among other factors. These inconsistencies attenuate reliability, increase error, and have questionable validity. Thus, an employer risks being unable to demonstrate that assessment via social media and the judgments made from this information have criterion-related validity. Furthermore, the increased likelihood of identifying protected characteristics renders the employer vulnerable to disparate treatment accusations if the job applicant suspects that this information was used to reject them (Davison et al., 2016). Although job applicants now expect that their social media profiles will be vetted (Berkelaar, 2014), this practice is typically not explicitly stated, thus applicants are denied the opportunity to consent or to correct any erroneous information. For this, and other reasons, applicants may perceive a privacy violation, rendering that organization less attractive upon learning that their social media has been reviewed (Stoughton et al., 2015).

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We agree that these concerns are legitimate and are reluctant to promote practices not currently backed by evidence. However, we also see rigorous, methodical evaluation of social media as a potential way to screen out applicants who espouse values that are antithetical to the organization's D&I goals and the requisite D&I competencies. For example, being a member of a white supremacist group is not illegal; however, it calls into question that person's suitability to be a police officer. Absent other sources, a prospective employer may have to rely on the applicant's Facebook page or Twitter feed to discover this information. If organizations choose to use social media as a selection tool, it is critical that they use clear guidelines and rubrics for the specific behaviors and memberships for which they want to screen. Although we cannot recommend this practice at this early date, we anticipate a time in the near future when the validity evidence of social media in selection will be clearer. We encourage I-O psychologists to consider this particular use—screening out applicants who espouse anti-D&I values on social media—as a potential research avenue.

#### *Tension between competencies, trained or selected*

An objection to our position might be that there are some jobs that require specialized knowledge that must be selected for (e.g., nuclear engineer, neurosurgeon, nurse, pharmacist, I-O psychologist) because it is too costly to train on in the organization, yet everyone can be trained on anti-harassment and discrimination attitudes and behaviors. As a rule, the candidate pool diminishes as specialized knowledge requirements increase. This perspective, however, is an individualist view of talent, whereby each person's talent individually and separately contributes to organizational goals. What is overlooked is the group processes related to talent and performance. When someone is harassing others, the targets of harassment do not perform as well (Willness et al., 2007), reducing the overall performance of the organization. Further, the *targets* of harassment end up at risk for organizational discipline and performance improvement plans because of the *perpetrator's* harassing behavior. When someone discriminates, they are keeping particular people out of the organization or from fully participating or progressing in the organization, thereby reducing the organization-level talent and limiting the organization's competitiveness. Further, there are very few instances in which talent is so rare that an organization must select a person who is completely deficient in a critical competency.

This is not to say that we should only rely on selection and never rely on training. As noted above, we need to use all of the tools at our disposal in order to eliminate harassment and discrimination from organizations. Our point is merely that if we wait to train people to not harass and discriminate, instead of selecting people who are already good at not harassing and discriminating, we allow for more opportunities to harass and discriminate in the organization.

### ***Performance management and appraisal***

If D&I KSAOs are included as competencies in the job description, then employees' performance will need to be evaluated on them. Importantly, consequences for discrimination and harassment will need to be established. To ensure that issues are being addressed in a timely fashion, we emphasize a focus on performance management in addition to appraisal.

An obvious indicator of an employee's D&I performance would be recorded reports of discrimination and harassment. In addition to the organization establishing a zero-tolerance policy for certain types of behaviors (e.g., physical or verbal assault, *quid pro quo* harassment, overt discrimination), organizations should also develop performance improvement and progressive discipline plans linked to D&I behavior, ideally curbing behaviors before they reach a crisis point. However, it is important to note that some harassment and discrimination is covert (Cortina, 2008). Thus, D&I performance management should not focus just on specific overt incidents but also on the everyday interpersonal interactions among employees. Utilizing an anonymously recorded

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360-degree feedback system to evaluate the D&I competency could capture those attitudes or behaviors that may not be classified as unlawful but are discriminatory or harassing nonetheless, as it would capture the treatment of others across an employee's power bases of relationships. Improvement plans could include additional training related to the specific problem area (e.g., appropriate verbal language); peer mentorship from someone with whom the employee could discuss interpersonal questions or concerns regarding sensitive diversity-related issues; or utilizing a restorative justice conflict management approach that emphasizes making amends and rebuilding trust between wrongdoer and injured party rather than punishment (Goodstein & Butterfield, 2010).

Like performance management and appraisal for other competencies, the benchmarks and means of evaluating D&I performance will vary across positions. For example, a hiring manager's D&I performance could be measured by examining recruitment tactics and diversity of new hires. A manager's performance could be evaluated by comparing their subordinates' performance ratings for differences based on group-membership characteristics and relational demography. Setting these benchmarks during regular performance management meetings and providing resources to aid in performance improvement is critical to ensuring that D&I is taken as a serious performance component.

D&I performance should significantly influence promotion and retention decisions. Simply stated, an employee who scores high in certain job performance metrics (e.g., task completion) but who scores low in D&I should not be promoted. An employee with a history of discrimination and harassment, whether it is overt or covert and persistent, should be fired, without exception, regardless of the difficulty that would arise in replacing that employee.

### *Policy analysis*

Organizations can have myriad policies that signal the degree to which they value and support inclusion, some of which we have already mentioned (e.g., sanctions for discriminatory actions, a focus on recruiting a diverse workforce). The most basic policy should be a nondiscrimination policy that extends protections beyond those groups protected by law to all persons in the organization (e.g., sexual orientation and gender identity minorities). In fact, the policy should emphasize that harassment and discrimination of any kind against any person will not be tolerated. In general, policies should take a multicultural, humanist approach whereby a diverse range of perspectives, attitudes, and values is equally welcomed and accepted (Larkey, 1996).

Policies should also be implemented that acknowledge that employees manage lives outside of the workplace (Aronson, 2002), thus moving away from internal structures that expect jobs to be performed by people wholly dedicated to their jobs and lacking in external obligations (Acker, 2006). These policies should support workers not *regardless of* their backgrounds and identities but rather *in relation to* their backgrounds and identities. A noncomprehensive list of policies that should be considered are flexible scheduling, paid parental leave, providing private areas for breast/chest-feeding parents, insurance coverage for trans-affirmative care and infertility treatment, and pay equity. Such policies will help reduce harassment and discrimination by (a) making the workplace more inclusive for more workers and (b) reducing the extent to which some experiences are treated as exceptional and in need of accommodation, which could be denied for some and not others. Ideally, organizations will be proactive in having these policies in place before a situation arises in which an employee is put into the awkward position of deciding whether requesting an exception will put their job at risk.

### *Training*

None of this is to say that training never makes a difference. As Hayes et al. (2020) review, training has a checkered history but can be effective in some circumstances and could be more effective if

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the training were better. Training will be needed to support employees on performance management plans regarding their D&I performance. Job- and organization-specific training regarding D&I might also be necessary for new employees who were selected for their general D&I competencies to be successful at their jobs. Regular antiharassment and antidiscrimination training will be useful to answer questions, update employees on policies, and emphasize corporate values.

## Conclusion

This commentary summarizes how I-O psychology tools beyond training can be used to reduce harassment and discrimination and increase diversity and inclusion in organizations. Still other tools in the I-O psychology toolkit could also be used, such as team selection and composition, organizational cultural analysis, or job design (among others). Which tools should be deployed depends on the specific problem to be addressed. We chose to describe and apply tools that are likely to have a broad reach in reducing and eliminating harassment and discrimination. Training is just one small part of what we can do. Why do we keep limiting ourselves?

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